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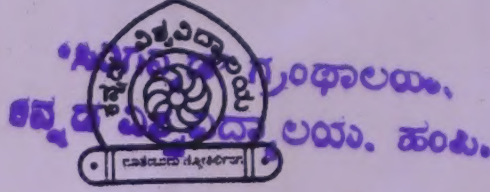
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1941

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ಕನ್ನಡ ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾಲಯ, ಹಂಪಿ,

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AND OTHER PLAYS

BY

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

INDIAN EDITION

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SANYASI,
OR THE ASCETIC

“Lead us from the unreal to the real.”

TO

DR. JAGADISH CHANDRA BOSE

SANYASI, OR THE ASCETIC

I

Sanyasi, outside the cave

THE division of days and nights is not for me, nor that of months and years. For me, the stream of time has stopped, on whose waves dances the world, like straws and twigs. In this dark cave I am alone, merged in myself,—and the eternal night is still, like a mountain lake afraid of its own depth. Water oozes and drips from the cracks, and in the pools float the ancient frogs. I sit chanting the incantation of nothingness. The world's limits recede, line after line.—The

stars, like sparks of fire, flown from the anvil of time, are extinct; and that joy is mine which comes to the God Shiva, when, after æons of dream, he wakes up to find himself alone in the heart of the infinite annihilation. I am free, I am the great solitary One. When I was thy slave, O Nature, thou didst set my heart against itself, and madest it carry the fierce war of suicide through its world. Desires, that have no other ends but to feed upon themselves and all that comes to their mouths, lashed me into fury. I ran about, madly chasing my shadow. Thou drovest me with thy lightning lashes of pleasure into the void of satiety. And the hungers, who are thy decoys, ever led me into the endless famine, where food turned into dust, and drink into vapour.

Till, when my world was spotted

with tears and ashes, I took my oath, that I would have revenge upon thee, interminable Appearance, mistress of endless disguises. I took shelter in the darkness,—the castle of the Infinite,—and fought the deceitful light, day after day, till it lost all its weapons and lay powerless at my feet. Now, when I am free of fear and desires, when the mist has vanished, and my reason shines pure and bright, let me go out into the kingdom of lies, and sit upon its heart, untouched and unmoved.

II

Sanyasi, by the roadside

How small is this earth and confined, watched and followed by the persistent horizons. The trees, houses, and crowd of things are pressing upon my eyes. The light, like a cage, has shut out the dark eternity; and the hours hop and cry within its barriers, like prisoned birds. But why are these noisy men rushing on, and for what purpose? They seem always afraid of missing something, — the something that never comes to their hands.

[*The crowd passes.*

(*Enter a VILLAGE ELDER and TWO WOMEN.*)

First Woman

O my, O my ! You *do* make me laugh.

Second Woman

But who says you are old ?

Village Elder

There are fools who judge men by their outside.

First Woman

How sad ! We have been watching your outside from our infancy. It is just the same all through these years.

Village Elder

Like the morning sun.

First Woman

Yes, like the morning sun in its shining baldness.

Village Elder

Ladies, you are over-critical in your taste. You notice things that are unessential.

Second Woman

Leave off your chatter, Ananga. Let us hasten home, or my man will be angry.

First Woman

Good-bye, sir. Please judge us from our outside, we won't mind that.

Village Elder

Because you have no inside to speak of.

[*They go.*]

(*Enter THREE VILLAGERS.*)

First Villager

Insult me? the scoundrel! He shall regret it.

Second Villager

He must be taught a thorough lesson.

First Villager

A lesson that will follow him to his grave.

Third Villager

Yes, brother, set your heart upon it. Never give him quarter.

Second Villager

He has grown too big.

First Villager

Big enough to burst at last.

Third Villager

The ants, when they begin to grow wings, perish.

Second Villager

But have you got a plan ?

First Villager

Not one, but hundreds. I will drive my ploughshare over his household.—I will give him a donkey-ride through the town, with his cheeks painted white and black. I will make the world too hot for him, and——

[*They go.*

(*Enter TWO STUDENTS.*)

First Student

I am sure Professor Madhab won in the debate.

Second Student

No, it was Professor Janardan.

First Student

Professor Madhab maintained his point to the last. He said that the subtle is the outcome of the gross.

Second Student

But Professor Janardan conclusively proved that the subtle is the origin of the gross.

First Student

Impossible.

Second Student

It is clear as the daylight.

First Student

Seeds come from the tree.

Second Student

The tree comes from the seed.

First Student

Sanyasi, which of these is true ?
Which is the original, the subtle or
the gross ?

Sanyasi

Neither.

Second Student

Neither. Well, that sounds satisfactory.

Sanyasi

The origin is the end, and the end is the origin. It is a circle.—The distinction between the subtle and gross is in your ignorance.

First Student

Well, it sounds very simple—and I think this was what my master meant.

Second Student

Certainly this agrees more with what
my master teaches.

[*They go out.*]

Sanyasi

These birds are word-peckers. When
they pick up some wriggling nonsense,
which can fill their mouth, they are
happy.

(*Enter TWO FLOWER-GIRLS, singing.*)

Song

The weary hours pass by.

*The flowers that blossom in the light
Fade and drop in the shadow.*

*I thought I would weave a garland
In the cool of the morning for my love.*

*But the morning wears on,
The flowers are not gathered,
And my love is lost.*

A Wayfarer

Why such regret, my darlings ?
When the garlands are ready, the
necks will not be wanting.

First Flower-Girl

Nor the halter.

Second Flower-Girl

You *are* bold. Why do you come
so close ?

Wayfarer

You quarrel for nothing, my girl.
I am far enough from you to allow an
elephant to pass between us.

Second Flower-Girl

Indeed. Am I such a fright ? I
wouldn't have eaten you, if you had
come.

[*They go out laughing.*]

(Comes an old BEGGAR.)

Beggar

Kind sirs, have pity on me. May God prosper you. Give me one handful from your plenty.

(Enters a SOLDIER.)

Soldier

Move away. Don't you see the Minister's son is coming ?

[They go out.]

Sanyasi

It is mid-day. The sun is growing strong. The sky looks like an overturned burning copper bowl. The earth breathes hot sighs, and the whirling sands dance by. What sights of man have I seen ! Can I ever again shrink back into the smallness of these creatures, and become one of them ?

No, I am free. I have not this obstacle, this world round me. I live in a pure desolation.

(Enter the girl VASANTI and a WOMAN.)

Woman

Girl, you are Raghu's daughter, aren't you? You should keep away from this road. Don't you know it goes to the temple?

Vasanti

I am on the farthest side, Lady.

Woman

But I thought my cloth-end touched you. I am taking my offerings to the goddess,—I hope they are not polluted.

Vasanti

I assure you, your cloth did not touch me. (*The WOMAN goes.*) I am Vasanti, Raghu's daughter. May I come to you, father ?

Sanyasi

Why not, child ?

Vasanti

I am a pollution, as they call me.

Sanyasi

But they are all that,—a pollution. They roll in the dust of existence. Only he is pure who has washed away the world from his mind. But what have you done, daughter ?

Vasanti

My father, who is dead, had defied their laws and their gods. He would not perform their rites.

Sanyasi

Why do you stand away from me ?

Vasanti

Will you touch me ?

Sanyasi

Yes, because nothing can touch me truly. I am ever away in the endless. You can sit here, if you wish.

Vasanti

(*Breaking into a sob.*) Never tell me to leave you, when once you have taken me near you.

Sanyasi

Wipe away your tears, child. I am a Sanyasi. I have neither hatred, nor attachment in my heart.—I never claim you as mine ; therefore I can never discard you. You are to me as this blue sky is,—you are,—yet you are not.

Vasanti

Father, I am deserted by gods and men alike.

Sanyasi

So am I. I have deserted both gods and men.

Vasanti

You have no mother ?

Sanyasi

No.

Vasanti

Nor father ?

Sanyasi

No.

Vasanti

Nor any friend ?

Sanyasi

No.

Vasanti

Then I shall be with you.—You won't leave me ?

Sanyasi

I have done with leaving. You can stay near me, yet never coming near me.

Vasanti

I do not understand you, father. Tell me, is there no shelter for me in the whole world ?

Sanyasi

Shelter ? Don't you know this world is a bottomless chasm ? The swarm of creatures, coming out from the hole of nothingness, seeks for shelter, and enters into the gaping mouth of this emptiness, and is lost. These are the ghosts of lies around you, who hold their market of illu-

sions,—and the foods which they sell are shadows. They only deceive your hunger, but do not satisfy. Come away from here, child, come away.

Vasanti

But, father, they seem so happy in this world. Can we not watch them from the roadside ?

Sanyasi

Alas, they do not understand. They cannot see that this world is death spread out to eternity.—It dies every moment, yet never comes to the end.—And we, the creatures of this world, live by feeding upon death.

Vasanti

Father, you frighten me.

(*Enters a TRAVELLER.*)

Traveller

Can I get a shelter near this place ?

Sanyasi

Shelter there is nowhere, my son,
but in the depth of one's self.—Seek
that ; hold to it fast, if you would be
saved.

Traveller

But I am tired, and want shelter.

Vasanti

My hut is not far from here. Will
you come ?

Traveller

But who are you ?

Vasanti

Must you know me ? I am Raghu's
daughter.

Traveller

God bless you, child, but I cannot
stay. [Goes.

(Men come bearing somebody on a bed.)

First Bearer

He is still asleep.

Second Bearer

How heavy the rascal is !

A Traveller (outside their group)

Whom do you carry ?

Third Bearer

Bindé, the weaver, was sleeping as one dead, and we have taken him away.

Second Bearer

But I am tired, brothers. Let us give him a shake, and waken him up.

Bindé (wakes up)

Ee, a, u——

Third Bearer

What's that noise ?

Bindé

I say. Who are you ? Where am I being carried ?

[They put down the bed from their shoulders.]

Third Bearer

Can't you keep quiet, like all decent dead people ?

Second Bearer

The cheek of him ! He must talk, even though he is dead.

Third Bearer

It would be more proper of you, if you kept still.

Bindé

I am sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen, you have made a mistake.—I was not dead, but fast asleep.

Second Bearer

I admire this fellow's impudence. Not only must he die, but argue.

Third Bearer

He won't confess the truth. Let us go, and finish the rites of the dead.

Bindé

I swear by your beard, my brother, I am as alive as any of you.

[*They take him away, laughing.*]

Sanyasi

The girl has fallen asleep, with her arm beneath her little head ; I think

I must leave her now, and go. But, coward, must you run away,—run away from this tiny thing? These are Nature's spiders' webs, they have danger merely for moths, and not for a Sanyasi like me.

Vasanti (awaking with a start)

Have you left me, Master?—Have you gone away?

Sanyasi

Why should I go away from you? What fear have I? Afraid of a shadow?

Vasanti

Do you hear the noise in the road?

Sanyasi

But stillness is in my soul.

(Enters a young WOMAN, followed by MEN.)

Woman

Go now. Leave me. Don't talk to me of love.

First Man

Why, what has been my crime ?

Woman

You men have hearts of stone.

First Man

Incredible. If our hearts were of stone, how could Cupid's darts make damage there ?

Other Man

Bravo. Well said.

Second Man

Now, what is your answer to that, my dear ?

Woman

Answer ! You think you have said something very fine,—don't you ? It is perfect rubbish.

First Man

I leave it to your judgment, gentlemen. What I said was this, that if our hearts be of stone, how can——

Third Man

Yes, yes, it has no answer at all.

First Man

Let me explain it to you. She said we men have hearts of stone, didn't she ? Well, I said, in answer, if our hearts were truly of stone, how could Cupid's darts damage them ? You understand ?

Second Man

Brother, I have been selling molasses in the town for the last twenty-four years,—do you think I cannot understand what you say ?

[They go out.]

Sanyasi

What are you doing, my child ?

Vasanti

I am looking at your broad palm, father. My hand is a little bird that finds its nest here. Your palm is great, like the great earth which holds all. These lines are the rivers, and these are hills.

[Puts her cheek upon it.]

Sanyasi

Your touch is soft, my daughter, like the touch of sleep. It seems to

me this touch has something of the great darkness, which touches one's soul with the wand of the eternal.— But, child, you are the moth of the daylight. You have your birds and flowers and fields—what can you find in me, who have my centre in the One and my circumference nowhere ?

Vasanti

I do not want anything else. Your love is enough for me.

Sanyasi

The girl imagines I love her,— foolish heart. She is happy in that thought. Let her nourish it. For they have been brought up in illusions, and they must have illusions to console them.

Vasanti

Father, this creeper trailing on the grass, seeking some tree to twine itself

round, is my creeper. I have tended it and watered it from the time when it had pushed up only two little leaves into the air, like an infant's cry. This creeper is me,—it has grown by the road-side, it can be so easily crushed. Do you see these beautiful little flowers, pale blue with white spots in their hearts?—these white spots are their dreams. Let me gently brush your forehead with these flowers. To me, things that are beautiful are the keys to all that I have not seen and not known.

Sanyasi

No, no, the beautiful is mere phantasy. To him who knows, the dust and the flower are the same.—But what languor is this that is creeping into my blood and drawing before my eyes a thin mist veil of all the rainbow colours? Is it Nature herself weaving

her dreams round me, clouding my senses ? (*Suddenly he tears the creeper, and rises up.*) No more of this ; for this is death. What game of yours is this with me, little girl ? I am a Sanyasi, I have cut all my knots, I am free.—No, no, not those tears. I cannot bear them.—But where was hidden in my heart this snake, this anger, that hissed out of its dark with its fang ? No, they are not dead,—they outlive starvation. These hell-creatures clatter their skeletons and dance in my heart, when their mistress, the great witch, plays upon her magic flute.—Weep not, child, come to me. You seem to me like a cry of a lost world, like the song of a wandering star. You bring to my mind something, which is infinitely more than this Nature,—more than the sun and stars. It is as great as the darkness. I understand it not. I have

never known it, therefore I fear it. I must leave you.—Go back whence you came,—the messenger of the unknown.

Vasanti

Leave me not, father,—I have none else but you.

Sanyasi

I must go, I thought that I had known,—but I do not know. Yet I must know. I leave you, to know who you are.

Vasanti

Father, if you leave me, I shall die.

Sanyasi

Let go my hand. Do not touch me. I must be free.—

[*He runs away.*]

III

(The SANYASI is seen, sitting upon a boulder in a mountain path. A shepherd boy passes by, singing.)

THE SONG

*Do not turn away your face, my love,
The spring has bared open its breast.*

*The flowers breathe their secrets in
the dark.*

*The rustle of the forest leaves comes
across the sky.*

Like the sobs of the night.

Come, love, show me your face.

Sanyasi

The gold of the evening is melting
in the heart of the blue sea. The
forest, on the hillside, is drinking the

last cup of the daylight. On the left, the village huts are seen through the trees with their evening lamps lighted, like a veiled mother watching by her sleeping children. Nature, thou art my slave. Thou hast spread thy many-coloured carpet in the great hall where I sit alone, like a king, and watch thee dance with thy starry necklace twinkling on thy breast.

[SHEPHERD GIRLS *pass by, singing.*

SONG OF THE SHEPHERD GIRLS

*The music comes from across the dark
river and calls me.*

I was in the house and happy.

*But the flute sounded in the still air of
night,*

And a pain pierced my heart.

Oh, tell me the way who know it,—

Tell me the way to him.

*I will go to him with my one little
flower,*

*And leave it at his feet,
And tell him that his music is one
with my love.*

[They go.]

Sanyasi

I think such an evening had come to me only once before in all my births. Then its cup overbrimmed with love and music, and I sat with some one, the memory of whose face is in that setting star of the evening.— But where is my little girl, with her dark sad eyes, big with tears? Is she there, sitting outside her hut, watching that same star through the immense loneliness of the evening? But the star must set, the evening close her eyes in the night, and tears must cease and sobs be stilled in sleep. No, I will not go back. Let the world-dreams take their own shape. Let me not trouble its course and create

new phantasies. I will see, and think, and know.

(Enters a ragged GIRL.)

Girl

Are you there, father ?

Sanyasi

Come, child, sit by me. I wish I could own that call of yours. Some one did call me father, once, and the voice was somewhat like yours. The father answers now,—but where is that call ?

Girl

Who are you ?

Sanyasi

I am a Sanyasi. Tell me, child, what is your father ?

Girl

He gathers sticks from the forest.

Sanyasi

And you have a mother ?

Girl

No. She died when I was young.

Sanyasi

Do you love your father ?

Girl

I love him more than anything else in the world. I have no one else but him.

Sanyasi

I understand you. Give me your little hand,—let me hold it in my palm,—in this big palm of mine.

Girl

Sanyasi, do you read palms ? Can you read in my palm all that I am and shall be ?

Sanyasi

I think I can read, but dimly know its meaning. One day I shall know it.

Girl

Now I must go to meet my father.

Sanyasi

Where ?

Girl

Where the road goes into the forest. He will miss me, if he does not find me there.

Sanyasi

Bring your head near to me, child.
Let me give you my kiss of blessing
before you go. [GIRL goes.]

(A MOTHER enters, with two children.)

Mother

How stout and chubby Misri's children are. They are something to look at. But the more I feed you, the more you seem to grow thin every day.

First Girl

But why do you always blame us for that, mother? Can we help it?

Mother

Don't I tell you to take plenty of rest? But you must always be running about.

Second Girl

But, mother, we run about on your errands.

Mother

How dare you answer me like that?

Sanyasi

Where are you going, daughter ?

Mother

My salutation, father. We are going home.

Sanyasi

How many are you ?

Mother

My mother-in-law, and my husband and two other children, beside these.

Sanyasi

How do you spend your days ?

Mother

I hardly know how my days pass. My man goes to the field, and I have my house to look after. Then, in the evening, I sit to spin with my elder

girls. (*To the girls.*) Go and salute the Sanyasi. Bless them, father.

[*They go.*

(*Enter TWO MEN.*)

First Man

Friend, go back from here. Do not come any farther.

Second Man

Yes, I know. Friends meet in this earth by chance, and the chance carries us on together some portion of the way, and then comes the moment when we must part.

Second Friend

Let us carry away with us the hope that we part to meet again.

First Friend

Our meetings and partings belong to all the movements of the world. Stars do not take special notice of us.

Second Friend

Let us salute those stars which *did* throw us together. If for a moment, still it has been much.

First Friend

Look back for a minute before you go. Can you see that faint glimmer of the water in the dark, and those *casuarina* trees on the sandy bank? Our village is all one heap of dark shadows. You can only see the lights. Can you guess which of those lights are ours?

Second Friend

Yes, I think I can.

First Friend

That light is the last farewell look of our past days upon their parting

guest. A little farther on, and there will remain one blot of darkness.

[*They go away.*]

Sanyasi

The night grows dark and desolate. It sits like a woman forsaken,—those stars are her tears turned into fire. O my child, the sorrow of your little heart has filled, for ever, all the nights of my life with its sadness. Your dear caressing hand has left its touch in this night air,—I feel it on my forehead,—it is damp with your tears. My darling, your sobs that pursued me, when I fled away, have clung to my heart. I shall carry them to my death.

IV

Sanyasi, in the village path

Let my vows of Sanyasi go. I break my staff and my alms-bowl. This stately ship, this world, which is crossing the sea of time,—let it take me up again, let me join once more the pilgrims. Oh the fool, who wanted to seek safety in swimming alone, and gave up the light of the sun and stars, to pick his way with his glow-worm's lamp! The bird flies in the sky, not to fly away into the emptiness, but to come back again to this great earth.—I am free. I am free from the bodiless chain of the *Nay*. I am free among things, and forms and purpose. The finite is the true infinite, and love knows its truth. My

girl, you are the spirit of all that is,—
I can never leave you.

(*Enters a VILLAGE ELDER.*)

Sanyasi

Do you know, brother, where
Raghu's daughter is ?

Elder

She has left her village, and we are
glad.

Sanyasi

Where has she gone ?

Elder

Do you ask where ? It is all one
to her where she goes. [*Goes out.*

Sanyasi

My darling has gone to seek a some-
where in the emptiness of nowhere.
She must find me.

(*A crowd of VILLAGERS enter.*)

First Man

So our King's son is going to be married to-night.

Second Man

Can you tell me, when is the wedding hour ?

Third Man

The wedding hour is only for the bridegroom and the bride. What have we got to do with it ?

A Woman

But won't they give us cakes for the happy day ?

First Man

Cakes ? You *are* silly. My uncle lives in the town—I have heard from him that we shall have curds and parched rice.

Second Man

Grand.

Fourth Man

But we shall have a great deal more water than curds. You may be sure of that.

First Man

Moti, you are a dull fellow. Water in the curds at a prince's wedding !

Fourth Man

But we are not princes ourselves, Panchu. For us, poor people, the curds have the trick of turning into water most parts.

First Man

Look there. That son of the charcoal-burner is still busy with his work. We mustn't allow that.

Second Man

We shall burn him into charcoal,
if he does not come out.

Sanyasi

Do you know, any of you, where is
Raghu's daughter ?

The Woman

She has gone away.

Sanyasi

Where ?

Woman

That we don't know.

First Man

But we are sure that she is not the
bride for our prince.

[*They laugh and go out.*]

(Enters a WOMAN, with a child.)

Woman

My obeisance to you, father. Let my child touch your feet with his head. He is sick. Bless him, father.

Sanyasi

But, daughter, I am no longer a Sanyasi. Do not mock me with your salutation.

Woman

Then who are you ? What are you doing ?

Sanyasi

I am seeking.

Woman

Seeking whom ?

Sanyasi S 022099

Seeking my lost world back.—Do you know Raghu's daughter? Where is she?

Woman

Raghu's daughter? She is dead.

Sanyasi

No, she cannot be dead. No. No.

Woman

But what is her death to you, Sanyasi?

Sanyasi

Not only to me; it would be death to all.

Woman

I do not understand you.

Sanyasi

She can never be dead.

‘సమగ్ర’ గ్రంథాలయం,
ఆంధ్ర ప్రదేశ్, విద్యాలయం, హైదరాబాద్.

MALINI

TO
MY NIECE
INDIRA DEVI

MALINI

ACT I

*The Balcony of the Palace facing the
street*

Malini

The moment has come for me, and my life, like the dewdrop upon a lotus leaf, is trembling upon the heart of this great time. I shut my eyes and seem to hear the tumult of the sky, and there is an anguish in my heart, I know not for what.

(Enters QUEEN.)

Queen

My child, what is this? Why do you forget to put on dresses that befit

your beauty and youth ? Where are your ornaments ? My beautiful dawn, how can you absent the touch of gold from your limbs ?

Malini

Mother, there are some who are born poor, even in a king's house. Wealth does not cling to those whose destiny it is to find riches in poverty.

Queen

That the child whose only language was the baby cry should talk to me in such riddles !—My heart quakes in fear when I listen to you. Where did you pick up your new creed, which goes against all our holy books ? My child, they say that the Buddhist monks, from whom you take your lessons, practise black arts ; that they cast their spells upon men's minds, confounding them with lies. But I

ask you, is religion a thing that one has to find by seeking? Is it not like sunlight, given to you for all days? I am a simple woman. I do not understand men's creeds and dogmas. I only know that women's true objects of worship come to their own arms, without asking, in the shape of their husbands and their children.

(*Enters KING.*)

King

My daughter, storm clouds are gathering over the King's house. Go no farther along your perilous path. Pause, if only for a short time.

Queen

What dark words are these?

King

My foolish child, if you must bring your new creed into this land of the

old, let it not come like a sudden flood threatening those who dwell on the bank. Keep your faith to your own self. Rake not up public hatred and mockery against it.

Queen

Do not chide my girl, and teach her the crookedness of your diplomacy. If my child should choose her own teachers and pursue her own path, I do not know who can blame her.

King

Queen, my people are agitated, they clamour for my daughter's banishment.

Queen

Banishment ? Of your own
daughter ?

King

The Brahmins, frightened at her heresy, have combined, and——

Queen

Heresy indeed ! Are all truths confined only in their musty old books ? Let them fling away their worm-eaten creeds, and come and take their lessons from this child. I tell you, King, she is not a common girl,—she is a pure flame of fire. Some divine spirit has taken birth in her. Do not despise her, lest some day you strike your forehead, and weep, and find her no more.

Malini

Father, grant to your people their request. The great moment has come. Banish me.

King

Why, child ? What want do you feel in your father's house ?

Malini

Listen to me, father. Those, who cry for my banishment, cry for me.

Mother, I have no words in which to tell you what I have in my mind. Leave me without regret, like the tree that sheds its flowers unheeding. Let me go out to all men,—for the world has claimed me from the King's hands.

King

Child, I do not understand you.

Malini

Father, you are a King. Be strong and fulfil your mission.

Queen

Child, is there no place for you here, where you were born? Is the burden of the world waiting for your little shoulders?

Malini

I dream, while I am awake, that the wind is wild, and the water is

troubled ; the night is dark, and the boat is moored in the haven. Where is the captain, who shall take the wanderers home ? I feel I know the path, and the boat will thrill with life at my touch, and speed on.

Queen

Do you hear, King ? Whose words are these ? Do they come from this little girl ? Is she your daughter, and have I borne her ?

King

Yes, even as the night bears the dawn,—the dawn that is not of the night, but of all the world.

Queen

King, have you nothing to keep her bound to your house,—this image of light ?—My darling, your hair has come loose on your shoulders. Let

me bind it up.—Do they talk of banishment, King? If this be a part of their creed, then let come the new religion, and let those Brahmins be taught afresh what is truth.

King

Queen, let us take away our child from this balcony. Do you see the crowd gathering in the street?

[They all go out.]

(Enter a crowd of BRAHMINS, in the street, before the palace balcony. They shout.)

Brahmins

Banishment of the King's daughter!

Kemankar

Friends, keep your resolution firm. The woman, as an enemy, is to be dreaded more than all others. For reason is futile against her and forces

are ashamed ; man's power gladly surrenders itself to her powerlessness, and she takes her shelter in the strongholds of our own hearts.

First Brahmin

We must have audience with our King, to tell him that a snake has raised its poisonous hood from his own nest, and is aiming at the heart of our sacred religion.

Supriya

Religion ? I *am* stupid. I do not understand you. Tell me, sir, is it your religion that claims the banishment of an innocent girl ?

First Brahmin

You are a marplot, Supriya, you are ever a hindrance to all our enterprises.

Second Brahmin

We have united in defence of our faith, and you come like a subtle rift in the wall, like a thin smile on the compressed lips of contempt.

Supriya

You think that, by the force of numbers, you will determine truth, and drown reason by your united shouts ?

First Brahmin

This is rank insolence, Supriya.

Supriya

The insolence is not mine but theirs who shape their scripture to fit their own narrow hearts.

Second Brahmin

Drive him out. He is none of us.

First Brahmin

We have all agreed upon the banishment of the Princess.—He who thinks differently, let him leave this assembly.

Supriya

Brahmins, it was a mistake on your part to elect me as one of your league. I am neither your shadow, nor an echo of your texts. I never admit that truth sides with the shrillest voice, and I am ashamed to own as mine a creed that depends on force for its existence. (*To KEMANKAR.*) Dear friend, let me go.

Kemankar

No, I will not. I know you are firm in your action, only doubting when you debate. Keep silence, my friend ; for the time is evil.

Supriya

Of all things the blind certitude of stupidity is the hardest to bear. To think of saving your religion by banishing a girl from her home ! But let me know what is her offence. Does she not maintain that truth and love are the body and soul of religion ? If so, is that not the essence of all creeds ?

Kemankar

Religion is one in its essence, but different in its forms. The water is one, yet by its different banks it is bounded and preserved for different peoples. What if you have a well-spring of your own in your heart, spurn not your neighbours who must go for their draught of water to their ancestral pond with the green of its gradual slopes mellowed by ages and its ancient trees bearing eternal fruit.

Supriya

I shall follow you, my friend, as I have ever done in my life, and not argue.

(*Enters third BRAHMIN.*)

Third Brahmin

I have good news. Our words have prevailed, and the King's army is about to take our side openly.

Second Brahmin

The army ?—I do not quite like it.

First Brahmin

Nor do I. It smells of rebellion.

Second Brahmin

Kemankar, I am not for such extreme measures.

First Brahmin

Our faith will give us victory, not our arms. Let us make penance, and recite sacred verses. Let us call on the names of our guardian gods.

Second Brahmin

Come, Goddess, whose wrath is the sole weapon of thy worshippers, deign to take form and crush even to dust the blind pride of unbelievers. Prove to us the strength of our faith, and lead us to victory.

All

We invoke thee, Mother, descend from thy heavenly heights and do thy work among mortals.

(*Enters MALINI.*)

Malini

I have come. (*They all bow to her, except KEMANKAR and SUPRIYA, who stand aloof and watch.*)

Second Brahmin

Goddess.—Thou hast come at last, as a daughter of man, withdrawing all thy terrible power into the tender beauty of a girl. Whence hast thou come, Mother ? What is thy wish ?

Malini

I have come down to my exile at your call.

Second Brahmin

To exile from heaven, because thy children of earth have called thee ?

First Brahmin

Forgive us, Mother. Utter ruin threatens this world and it cries aloud for thy help.

Malini

I will never desert you. I always knew that your doors were open for

me. The cry went from you for my banishment and I woke up, amidst the wealth and pleasure of the King's house.

Kemankar

The Princess.

All

The King's daughter.

Malini

I am exiled from my home, so that I may make your home my own. Yet tell me truly, have you need of me? When I lived in seclusion, a lonely girl, did you call to me from the outer world? Was it no dream of mine?

First Brahmin

Mother, you have come, and taken your seat in the heart of our hearts.

Malini

I was born in a King's house, never once looking out from my window. I had heard that it was a sorrowing world,—the world out of my reach. But I did not know where it felt its pain. Teach me to find this out.

First Brahmin

Your sweet voice brings tears to our eyes.

Malini

The moon has just come out of those clouds. Great peace is in the sky. It seems to gather all the world in its arms, under the fold of one vast moonlight. There goes the road, losing itself among the solemn trees with their still shadows. There are the houses, and there the temple; the river bank in the distance looks dim

and desolate. I seem to have come down, like a sudden shower from a cloud of dreams, into this world of men, by the roadside.

First Brahmin

You are the divine soul of this world.

Second Brahmin

Why did not our tongues burst in pain, when they shouted for your banishment ?

First Brahmin

Come, Brahmins, let us restore our Mother to her home.

[*They shout.*

Victory to the Mother of the world !
Victory to the Mother in the heart
of the Man's daughter !

[*MALINI goes, surrounded by them.*

Kemankar

Let the illusion vanish. Where are you going, Supriya, like one walking in his sleep ?

Supriya

Leave hold of me, let me go.

Kemankar

Control yourself. Will you, too, fly into the fire with the rest of the blinded swarm ?

Supriya

Was it a dream, Kemankar ?

Kemankar

It was nothing but a dream. Open your eyes, and wake up.

Supriya

Your hope of heaven is false, Kemankar. Vainly have I wandered in

the wilderness of doctrines,—I never found peace. The God, who belongs to the multitude, and the God of the books are not my own God. These never answered my questions and never consoled me. But, at last, I have found the divine breathing and alive in the living world of men.

Kemankar

Alas, my friend, it is a fearful moment when a man's heart deceives him. Then blind desire becomes his gospel and fancy usurps the dread throne of his gods. Is yonder moon, lying asleep among soft fleecy clouds, the true emblem of everlasting reality? The naked day will come to-morrow, and the hungry crowd begin again to draw the sea of existence with their thousand nets. And then this moonlight night will hardly be remembered, but as a thin film of unreality made of

sleep and shadows and delusions. The magic web, woven of the elusive charms of a woman, is like that,—and can it take the place of highest truth? Can any creed, born of your fancy, satisfy the gaping thirst of the mid-day, when it is wide awake in its burning heat?

Supriya

Alas, I know not.

Kemankar

Then shake yourself up from your dreams, and look before you. The ancient house is on fire, whose nurslings are the ages. The spirits of our forefathers are hovering over the impending ruins, like crying birds over their perishing nests. Is this the time for vacillation, when the night is dark, the enemies knocking at the gate, the citizens asleep, and men drunken with

delusions laying their hands upon
their brothers' throats ?

Supriya

I will stand by you.

Kemankar

I must go away from here.

Supriya

Where ? And for what ?

Kemankar

To foreign lands. I shall bring
soldiers from outside. For this con-
flagration cries for blood, to be
quenched.

Supriya

But our own soldiers are ready.

Kemankar

Vain is all hope of help from them.
They, like moths, are already leaping

into the fire. Do you not hear how they are shouting like fools? The whole town has gone mad, and is lighting her festival lamps at the funeral pyre of her own sacred faith.

Supriya

If you must go, take me with you.

Kemankar

No. You remain here, to watch and keep me informed. But, friend, let your heart be not drawn away from me by the novelty of the falsehood.

Supriya

Falsehood is new, but our friendship is old. We have ever been together from our childhood. This is our first separation.

Kemankar

May it prove our last! In evil times the strongest bonds give way.

Brothers strike brothers and friends
turn against friends. I go out into
the dark, and in the darkness of night
I shall come back to the gate. Shall
I find my friend watching for me,
with the lamp lighted? I take away
that hope with me. [They go.

(Enter KING, with the PRINCE, in the
balcony.)

King

I fear I must decide to banish my
daughter.

Prince

Yes, Sire, delay will be dangerous.

King

Gently, my son, gently. Never
doubt that I will do my duty. Be
sure I will banish her.

[PRINCE goes.

(*Enters QUEEN.*)

Tell me, King, where is she ? Have you hidden her, even from me ?

King

Whom ?

Queen

My Malini.

King

What ? Is she not in her room ?

Queen

No, I cannot find her. Go with your soldiers and search for her through all the town, from house to house. The citizens have stolen her. Banish them all. Empty the whole town, till they return her.

King

I will bring her back,—even if my Kingdom goes to ruin.

[*The BRAHMINS and soldiers bring MALINI, with torches lighted.*]

Queen

My darling, my cruel child. I never keep my eyes off you,—how could you evade me, and go out ?

Second Brahmin

Do not be angry with her, Queen. She came to our home to give us her blessings.

First Brahmin

Is she only yours ? And does she not belong to us as well ?

Second Brahmin

Our little mother, do not forget us. You are our star, to lead us across the pathless sea of life.

Malini

My door has been opened for you. These walls will nevermore separate us.

Brahmins

Blessed are we, and the land where
we were born. [They go.

Malini

Mother, I have brought the outer
world into your house. I seem to
have lost the bounds of my body. I
am one with the life of this world.

Queen

Yes, child. Now you shall never
need to go out. Bring in the world
to you, and to your mother.—It is
close upon the second watch of the
night. Sit here. Calm yourself. This
flaming life in you is burning out all
sleep from your eyes.

Malini

(*Embracing her mother.*) Mother, I
am tired. My body is trembling. So

vast is this world.—Mother dear, sing
me to sleep. Tears come to my eyes,
and a sadness descends upon my
heart.

ACT II

The Palace Garden

MALINI and SUPRIYA

Malini

What can I say to you ? I do not know how to argue. I have not read your books.

Supriya

I am learned only among the fools of learning. I have left all arguments and books behind me. Lead me, princess, and I shall follow you, as the shadow follows the lamp.

Malini

But, Brahmin, when you question me, I lose all my power and do not

know how to answer you. It is a wonder to me to see that even you, who know everything, come to me with your questions.

Supriya

Not for knowledge I come to you. Let me forget all that I have ever known. Roads there are, without number, but the light is missing.

Malini

Alas, sir, the more you ask me, the more I feel my poverty. Where is that voice in me, which came down from heaven, like an unseen flash of lightning, into my heart? Why did you not come that day, but keep away in doubt? Now that I have met the world face to face my heart has grown timid, and I do not know how to hold the helm of the great ship that I must guide. I feel I am alone,

and the world is large, and ways are many, and the light from the sky comes of a sudden to vanish the next moment. You who are wise and learned, will you help me ?

Supriya

I shall deem myself fortunate, if you ask my help.

Malini

There are times when despair comes to choke all the life-currents ; when suddenly, amidst crowds of men, my eyes turn upon myself and I am frightened. Will you befriend me in those moments of blankness, and utter me one word of hope that will bring me back to life ?

Supriya

I shall keep myself ready. I shall make my heart simple and pure, and

my mind peaceful, to be able truly to serve you.

(*Enters ATTENDANT.*)

Attendant

The citizens have come, asking to see you.

Malini

Not to-day. Ask their pardon for me. I must have time to fill my exhausted mind, and have rest to get rid of weariness. (ATTENDANT goes.) Tell me again about Kemankar, your friend. I long to know what your life has been and its trials.

Supriya

Kemankar is my friend, my brother, my master. His mind has been firm and strong, from early days, while my thoughts are always flickering with

doubts. Yet he has ever kept me close to his heart, as the moon does its dark spots. But, however strong a ship may be, if it harbours a small hole in its bottom, it must sink.—That I would make you sink, Kemankar, was in the law of nature.

Malini

You made him sink ?

Supriya

Yes, I did. The day when the rebellion slunk away in shame before the light in your face and the music in the air that touched you, Kemankar alone was unmoved. He left me behind him, and said that he must go to the foreign land to bring soldiers, and uproot the new creed from the sacred soil of Kashi.—You know what followed. You made me live again in a new land of birth. “Love for

all life " was a mere word, waiting from the old time to be made real,—and I saw that truth in you in flesh. My heart cried for my friend, but he was away, out of my reach; then came his letter, in which he wrote that he was coming with a foreign army at his back, to wash away the new faith in blood, and to punish you with death.—I could wait no longer. I showed the letter to the King.

Malini

Why did you forget yourself, Supriya? Why did fear overcome you? Have I not room enough in my house for him and his soldiers?

(*Enters KING.*)

King

Come to my arms, Supriya; I went at a fit time to surprise Kemankar

and to capture him. An hour later, and a thunderbolt would have burst upon my house in my sleep. You are my friend, Supriya, come——

Supriya

God forgive me.

King

Do you not know that a King's love is not unsubstantial? I give you leave to ask for any reward that comes to your mind. Tell me, what do you want?

Supriya

Nothing, Sire, nothing. I shall live, begging from door to door.

King

Only ask me, and you shall have provinces worthy to tempt a king.

Supriya

They do not tempt me.

King

I understand you. I know towards what moon you raise your hands. Mad youth, be brave to ask even that which seems so impossible. Why are you silent? Do you remember the day when you prayed for my Malini's banishment? Will you repeat that prayer to me, to lead my daughter to exile from her father's house?—My daughter, do you know that you owe your life to this noble youth? And is it hard for you to pay off that debt with your——?

Supriya

For pity's sake, Sire, no more of this. Worshippers there are many who by lifelong devotion have gained the highest fulfilment of their desire. Could I be counted one of them I should be happy. But to accept it

from the King's hands as the reward of treachery? Lady mine, you have the plenitude and peace of your greatness; you know not the secret cravings of a poverty-stricken soul. I dare not ask from you an atom more than that pity of love which you have for every creature in the world.

Malini

Father, what is your punishment for the captive?

King

He shall die.

Malini

On my knees I beg from you his pardon.

King

But he is a rebel, my child.

Supriya

Do you judge him, King? He also judged you, when he came to punish you, not to rob your kingdom.

Malini

Spare him his life, father. Then only will you have the right to bestow on him your friendship, who has saved you from a great peril.

King

What do you say, Supriya? Shall I restore a friend to his friend's arms?

Supriya

That will be king-like in its grace.

King

It will come in its time, and you will find back your friend. But a

King's generosity must not stop there. I must give you something which exceeds your hope,—yet not as a mere reward. You have won my heart, and my heart is ready to offer you its best treasure.—My child, where was this shyness in you before now? Your dawn had no tint of rose,—its light was white and dazzling. But to-day a tearful mist of tenderness sweetly tempers it for mortal eyes. (*To SUPRIYA.*) Leave my feet, rise up and come to my heart. Happiness is pressing it like pain. Leave me now for a while. I want to be alone with my Malini. (*SUPRIYA goes.*) I feel I have found back my child once again,—not the bright star of the sky, but the sweet flower that blossoms on earthly soil. She is my daughter, the darling of my heart.

(*Enters ATTENDANT.*)

Attendant

The captive, Kemankar, is at the door.

King

Bring him in. Here comes he, with his eyes fixed, his proud head held high, a brooding shadow on his forehead, like a thunder-cloud motionless in a suspended storm.

Malini

The iron chain is shamed of itself upon those limbs. The insult to greatness is its own insult. He looks like a god defying his captivity.

(Enters KEMANKAR in chains.)

King

What punishment do you expect from my hands ?

Kemankar

Death.

King

But if I pardon you ?

Kemankar

Then I shall have time again to complete the work I began.

King

You seem out of love with your life. Tell me your last wish, if you have any.

Kemankar

I want to see my friend, Supriya, before I die.

King

(*To the attendant.*) Ask Supriya to come.

Malini

There is a power in that face that frightens me. Father, do not let Supriya come.

King

Your fear is baseless, child.

(SUPRIYA *enters, and walks towards*
KEMANKAR, *with arms extended.*)

Kemankar

No, no, not yet. First let us have our say, and then the greeting of love.—Come closer to me. You know I am poor in words,—and my time is short. My trial is over, but not yours. Tell me, why have you done this ?

Supriya

Friend, you will not understand me. I had to keep my faith, even at the cost of my love.

Kemankar

I understand you, Supriya. I have seen that girl's face, glowing with an inner light, looking like a

voice becoming visible. You offered, to the fire of those eyes, the faith in your fathers' creed, the faith in your country's good, and built up a new one on the foundation of a treason.

Supriya

Friend, you are right. My faith has come to me perfected in the form of that woman. Your sacred books were dumb to me. I have read, by the help of the light of those eyes, the ancient book of creation, and I have known that true faith is there, where there is man, where there is love. It comes from the mother in her devotion, and it goes back to her from her child. It descends in the gift of a giver and it appears in the heart of him who takes it. I accepted the bond of this faith which reveals the infinite in man, when I set my eyes upon that face full of

light and love and peace of hidden wisdom.

Kemankar

I also once set my eyes on that face, and for a moment dreamt that religion had come at last, in the form of a woman, to lead man's heart to heaven. For a moment, music broke out from the very ribs of my breast and all my life's hopes blossomed in their fulness. Yet did not I break through these meshes of illusion to wander in foreign lands ? Did not I suffer humiliation from unworthy hands in patience, and bear the pain of separation from you, who have been my friend from my infancy ? And what have you been doing meanwhile ? You sat in the shade of the King's garden, and spent your sweet leisure in idly weaving a lie to condone your infatuation and calling it a religion.

Supriya

My friend, is not this world wide enough to hold men whose natures are widely different? Those countless stars of the sky, do they fight for the mastery of the One? Cannot faiths hold their separate lights in peace for the separate worlds of minds that need them?

Kemankar

Words, mere words. To let falsehood and truth live side by side in amity, the infinite world is not wide enough. That the corn ripening for the food of man should make room for thorny weeds, love is not so hatefully all-loving. That one should be allowed to sap the sure ground of friendship with betrayal of trust, could tolerance be so traitorously wide as that? That one should die like a

thief to defend his faith and the other live in honour and wealth who betrayed it—no, no, the world is not so stony-hard as to bear without pain such hideous contradictions in its bosom.

Supriya

(*To MALINI.*) All these hurts and insults I accept in your name, my lady. Kemankar, you are paying your life for your faith,—I am paying more. It is your love, dearer than my life.

Kemankar

No more of this prating. All truths must be tested in death's court. My friend, do you remember our student days when we used to wrangle the whole night through, to come at last to our teacher, in the morning, to know in a moment which of us was right. Let that morning break now.

Let us go there to that land of the final, and stand before death with all our questions, where the changing mist of doubts will vanish at a breath, and the mountain peaks of eternal truth will appear, and we two fools will look at each other and laugh.—Dear friend, bring before death that which you deem your best and immortal.

Supriya

Friend, let it be as you wish.

Kemankar

Then come to my heart. You had wandered far from your comrade, in the infinite distance,—now, dear friend, come eternally close to me, and accept from one, who loves you, the gift of death. (*Strikes SUPRIYA with his chains, and SUPRIYA falls.*)

Kemankar

(*Embracing the dead body of
SUPRIYA.*) Now call your executioner.

King

(*Rising up.*) Where is my sword ?

Malini

Father, forgive Kemankar !

SACRIFICE

I DEDICATE THIS PLAY
TO THOSE HEROES WHO
BRAVELY STOOD FOR PEACE
WHEN HUMAN SACRIFICE
WAS CLAIMED FOR THE
GODDESS OF WAR

SACRIFICE

A temple in Tippera

(Enters GUNAVATI, the Queen.)

Gunavati

Have I offended thee, dread Mother?
Thou grantest children to the beggar
woman, who sells them to live, and
to the adulteress, who kills them to
save herself from infamy, and here
am I, the Queen, with all the world
lying at my feet, hankering in vain
for the baby-touch at my bosom, to
feel the stir of a dearer life within my
life. What sin have I committed,
Mother, to merit this,—to be banished
from the mothers' heaven?

(*Enters RAGHUPATI, the priest.*)

O Master, have I ever been remiss in my worship? And my husband, is he not godlike in his purity? Then why has the Goddess, who weaves the web of this world-illusion, assigned my place in the barren waste of childlessness?

Raghupati

Our Mother is all caprice, she knows no law, our sorrows and joys are mere freaks of her mind. Have patience, daughter, to-day we shall offer special sacrifice in your name to please her.

Gunavati

Accept my grateful obeisance, father. My offerings are already on their way to the temple,—the red bunches of hibiscus and beasts of sacrifice.

[*They go out.*]

Enter GOVINDA, the King; JAISING, the servant of temple; and APARNA, the beggar girl.

Jaising

What is your wish, Sire ?

Govinda

Is it true that this poor girl's pet goat has been brought by force to the temple to be killed ? Will Mother accept such a gift with grace ?

Jaising

King, how are we to know from whence the servants collect our daily offerings of worship ? But, my child, why is this weeping ? Is it worthy of you to shed tears for that which Mother herself has taken ?

Aparna

Mother ! I am his mother. If I return late to my hut, he refuses his

grass, and bleats, with his eyes on the road. I take him up in my arms, when I come, and share my food with him. He knows no other mother but me.

Jaising

Sire, could I make the goat live again, by giving up a portion of my life, gladly would I do it. But how can I restore that which Mother herself has taken ?

Aparna

Mother has taken ? It is a lie. Not mother, but demon.

Jaising

O, the blasphemy !

Aparna

Mother, art thou there to rob a poor girl of her love ? Then where is the throne, before which to condemn thee ? Tell me, King.

Govinda

I am silent, my child. I have no answer.

Aparna

This blood-streak running down the steps, is it his ? O my darling, when you trembled and cried for dear life, why did your call not reach my heart through the whole deaf world ?

Jaising

(*To the image*) I have served thee from my infancy, Mother Kali, yet I understand thee not. Does pity only belong to weak mortals, and not to gods ? Come with me, my child, let me do for you what I can. Help must come from man, when it is denied from gods.

[*Jaising and Aparna go out.*]

(*Enter RAGHUPATI ; NAKSHATRA, who is the King's brother ; and the courtiers.*)

All

Victory be to the King !

Govinda

Know you all, that I forbid shedding of blood in the temple from to-day for ever.

Minister

You forbid sacrifice to the Goddess ?

General Nayan Rai

Forbid sacrifice ?

Nakshatra

How terrible ! Forbid sacrifice ?

Raghupati

Is it a dream ?

Govinda

No dream, father. It is awakening. Mother came to me, in a girl's disguise, and told me that blood she cannot suffer.

Raghupati

She has been drinking blood for ages. Whence comes this loathing all of a sudden ?

Govinda

No, she never drank blood, she kept her face averted.

Raghupati

I warn you, think and consider. You have no power to alter laws laid down in scriptures.

Govinda

God's words are above all laws.

Raghupati

Do not add pride to your folly.
Do you have the effrontery to say
that *you* alone have heard God's
words, and not I ?

Nakshatra

It is strange, that the King should
have heard from gods and not the
priest.

Govinda

God's words are ever ringing in the
world, and he who is wilfully deaf
cannot hear them.

Raghupati

Atheist ! Apostate !

Govinda

Father, go to your morning service,
and declare to all worshippers that

from hence they will be punished with banishment, who shed creatures' blood in their worship of the Mother of all creatures.

Raghupati

Is this your last word ?

Govinda

Yes.

Raghupati

Then curse upon you ! Do you, in your enormous pride, imagine that the Goddess, dwelling in your land, is your subject ? Do you presume to bind her with your laws and rob her of her dues ? You shall never do it. I declare it,—I who am her servant.

[Goes.

Nayan Rai

Pardon me, Sire, but have you the right ?

Minister

King, is it too late to revoke your order ?

Govinda

We dare not delay to uproot sin from our realm.

Minister

Sin can never have such a long lease of life. Could they be sinful,—the rites that have grown old at the feet of the Goddess ?

[The King is silent.]

Nakshatra

Indeed they could not be.

Minister

Our ancestors have performed these rites with reverence ; can you have the heart to insult them ?

[The King remains silent.]

Nayan Rai

That which has the sanction of ages, have you the right to remove it ?

Govinda

No more doubts and disputes. Go
and spread my order in all my lands.

Minister

But, Sire, the Queen has offered her
sacrifice for this morning's worship ;
it is come near the temple gate.

Govinda

Send it back. [*He goes.*]

Minister

What is this ?

Nakshatra

Are we, then, to come down to the
level of Buddhists, and treat animals
as if they have their right to live ?
Preposterous !

[*They all go out.*]

(*Enters RAGHUPATI,—JAISING following him with a jar of water to wash his feet.*)

Jaising

Father.

Raghupati

Go !

Jaising

Here is some water.

Raghupati

No need of it !

Jaising

Your clothes.

Raghupati

Take them away !

Jaising

Have I done anything to offend you ?

Raghupati

Leave me alone. The shadows of evil have thickened. The King's throne is raising its insolent head above the temple altar. Ye gods of these degenerate days, are ye ready to obey the King's laws with bowed heads, fawning upon him like his courtiers? Have only men and demons combined to usurp gods' dominions in this world, and is heaven powerless to defend its honour? But there remain the Brahmins, though the gods be absent; and the King's throne will supply fuel to the sacrificial fire of their anger. My child, my mind is distracted.

Jaising

Whatever has happened, father?

Raghupati

I cannot find words to say. Ask the Mother Goddess who has been defied.

Jaising

Defied ? By whom ?

Raghupati

By King Govinda.

Jaising

King Govinda defied Mother Kali ?

Raghupati

Defied you and me, all scriptures,
all countries, all time, defied Mahākālī,
the Goddess of the endless stream of
time,—sitting upon that puny little
throne of his.

Jaising

King Govinda ?

Raghupati

Yes, yes, your King Govinda, the
darling of your heart. Ungrateful !

I have given all my love to bring you up, and yet King Govinda is dearer to you than I am.

Jaising

The child raises its arms to the full moon, sitting upon his father's lap. You are my father, and my full moon is King Govinda. Then is it true, what I hear from people, that our King forbids all sacrifice in the temple? But in this we cannot obey him.

Raghupati

Banishment is for him who does not obey.

Jaising

It is no calamity to be banished from a land where Mother's worship remains incomplete. No, so long as I live, the service of the temple shall be fully performed.

[*They go out.*]

(*Enter GUNAVATI and her attendant.*)

Gunavati

What is it you say ? The Queen's sacrifice turned away from the temple gate ? Is there a man in this land who carries more than one head on his shoulders, that he could dare think of it ? Who is that doomed creature ?

Attendant

I am afraid to name him.

Gunavati

Afraid to name him, when I ask you ? Whom do you fear more than me ?

Attendant

Pardon me.

Gunavati

Only last evening court minstrels came to sing my praise, Brahmins

blessed me, the servants silently took their orders from my mouth. What can have happened, in the meantime, that things have become completely upset,—the Goddess refused her worship, and the Queen her authority. Was Tripura a dreamland? Give my salutation to the priest, and ask him to come.

[*Attendant goes out.*]

(*Enters GOVINDA.*)

Gunavati

Have you heard, King? My offerings have been sent back from Mother's temple.

Govinda

I know it.

Gunavati

You know it, and yet bear the insult?

Govinda

I beg to ask your pardon for the culprit.

Gunavati

I know, King, your heart is merciful, but this is no mercy. It is feebleness. If your kindness hampers you, leave the punishment in my hand. Only, tell me, who is he ?

Govinda

It is I, my Queen. My crime was in nothing else but having given you pain.

Gunavati

I do not understand you.

Govinda

From to-day shedding of blood in gods' temples is forbidden in my land.

Gunavati

Who forbids it ?

Govinda

Mother herself.

Gunavati

Who heard it ?

Govinda

I.

Gunavati

You ! That makes me laugh. The Queen of all the world comes to the gate of Tripura's King with her petition.

Govinda

Not with her petition, but with her sorrow.

Gunavati

Your dominion is outside the temple limit. Do not send your commands there, where they are impertinent.

Govinda

The command is not mine, it is Mother's.

Gunavati

If you have no doubt in your decision, do not cross my faith. Let me perform my worship according to my light.

Govinda

I promised my Goddess to prevent sacrifice of life in her temple, and I must carry it out.

Gunavati

I also promised my Goddess the blood of three hundred kids and one hundred buffaloes, and I will carry it out. You may leave me now.

Govinda

As you wish.

[*He goes out.*]

(*Enters RAGHUPATI.*)

Gunavati

My offerings have been turned back from the temple, father.

Raghupati

The worship offered by the most ragged of all beggars is not less precious than yours, Queen. But the misfortune is that Mother has been deprived. The misfortune is that the King's pride is growing into a bloated monster, obstructing divine grace, fixing its angry red eyes upon all worshippers.

Gunavati

What will come of all this, father ?

Raghupati

That is only known to her, who fashions this world with her dreams.

But this is certain, that the throne, which casts its shadow upon Mother's shrine, will burst like a bubble, vanishing in the void.

Gunavati

Have mercy and save us, father.

Raghupati

Ha, ha ! I am to save you,—you, the consort of a King who boasts of his kingdom in the earth and in heaven as well, before whom the gods and the Brahmins must,—Oh, shame ! Oh, the evil age, when the Brahmin's futile curse recoils upon himself, to sting him into madness.

[*About to tear his sacrificial thread.*]

Gunavati

[*Preventing him.*] Have mercy upon me.

Raghupati

Then give back to Brahmins what are theirs by right.

Gunavati

Yes, I will. Go, master, to your worship and nothing will hinder you.

Raghupati

Indeed your favour overwhelms me. At the merest glance of your eyes gods are saved from ignominy and the Brahmin is restored to his sacred offices. Thrive and grow fat and sleek till the dire day of judgment comes. [Goes out.

(*Re-enters* KING GOVINDA.)

Govinda

My Queen, the shadow of your angry brows hides all light from my heart.

Gunavati

Go ! Do not bring a curse upon this house.

Govinda

Woman's smile removes all curse from the house, her love is God's grace.

Gunavati

Go, and never show your face to me again.

Govinda

I shall come back, my Queen, when you remember me.

Gunavati

[*Clinging to the King's feet.*] Pardon me, King. Have you become so hard that you forget to respect woman's pride ? Do you not know, beloved, that thwarted love takes the disguise of anger ?

Govinda

I would die, if I lost my trust in you. I know, my love, that clouds are for moments only, and the sun is for all days.

Gunavati

Yes, the clouds will pass by, God's thunder will return to his armoury, and the sun of all days will shine upon the traditions of all time. Yes, my King, order it so, that Brahmins be restored to their rights, the Goddess to her offerings, and the King's authority to its earthly limits.

Govinda

It is not the Brahmin's right to violate the eternal good. The creature's blood is not the offering for gods. And it is within the rights of the King and the peasant alike to maintain truth and righteousness.

Gunavati

I prostrate myself on the ground before you ; I beg at your feet. The custom, that comes through all ages, is not the King's own. Like heaven's air, it belongs to all men. Yet your Queen begs it of you, with clasped hands, in the name of your people. Can you still remain silent, proud man, refusing entreaties of love in favour of duty which is doubtful ? Then go, go, go from me. [*They go.*]

(*Enter RAGHUPATI, JAISING, and NAYAN RAI.*)

Raghupati

General, your devotion to Mother is well known.

Nayan Rai

It runs through generations of my ancestors.

Raghupati

Let this sacred love give you indomitable courage. Let it make your sword-blade mighty as God's thunder, and win its place above all powers and positions of this world.

Nayan Rai

The Brahmin's blessings will never be in vain.

Raghupati

Then I bid you collect your soldiers and strike Mother's enemy down to the dust.

Nayan Rai

Tell me, father, who is the enemy ?

Raghupati

Govinda.

Nayan Rai

Our King ?

Raghupati

Yes, attack him with all your force.

Nayan Rai

It is evil advice. Father, is this to try me ?

Raghupati

Yes, it is to try you, to know for certain whose servant you are. Give up all hesitation. Know that the Goddess calls, and all earthly bonds must be severed.

Nayan Rai

I have no hesitation in my mind. I stand firm in my post, where my Goddess has placed me.

Raghupati

You are brave.

Nayan Rai

Am I the basest of Mother's servants, that the order should come for me to turn traitor? She herself stands upon the faith of man's heart. Can she ask me to break it? Then to-day comes to dust the King, and to-morrow the Goddess herself.

Jaising

Noble words.

Raghupati

The King, who has turned traitor to Mother, has lost all claims to your allegiance.

Nayan Rai

Drive me not, father, into a wilderness of debates. I know only one path,—the straight path of faith and truth. This stupid servant of Mother shall never swerve from that highway of honour.

[*Goes out.*]

Jaising

Let us be strong in our faith as he is, Master. Why ask the aid of soldiers? We have the strength within ourselves for the task given to us from above. Open the temple gate wide, father. Sound the drum. Come, come, O citizens, to worship her, who takes all fear away from our hearts. Come, Mother's children.

[*Citizens come.*]

First Citizen

Come, come, we are called.

All

Victory to Mother!

[*They sing and dance.*]

*The dread Mother dances naked in the
battlefield,
Her lolling tongue burns like a red
flame of fire,*

*Her dark tresses fly in the sky, sweeping
away the sun and stars,
Red streams of blood run from her
cloud-black limbs,
And the world trembles and cracks
under her tread.*

Jaising

Do you see the beasts of sacrifice
coming towards the temple, driven
by the Queen's attendants ?

(They cry.)

Victory to Mother ! Victory to our
Queen !

Raghupati

Jaising, make haste and get ready
for the worship.

Jaising

Everything is ready, father.

Raghupati

Send a man to call Prince Nakshatra in my name.

[JAISING goes. *Citizens sing and dance.*

Govinda

Silence, Raghupati ! Do you dare to disregard my order ?

Raghupati

Yes, I do.

Govinda

Then you are not for my land.

Raghupati

No, my land is there, where the King's crown kisses the dust. No ! Citizens ! Let Mother's offerings be brought in here.

[*They beat drums.*

Govinda

Silence ! (*To his attendants.*) Ask my General to come. Raghupati, you drive me to call soldiers to defend God's right. I feel the shame of it ; for the force of arms only reveals man's weakness.

Raghupati

Sceptic, are you so certain in your mind that Brahmins have lost the ancient fire of their sacred wrath ? No, its flame will burst out from my heart to burn your throne into ashes. If it does not, then I shall throw into the fire the scriptures, and my Brahmin pride, and all the arrant lies that fill our temple shrines in the guise of the divine.

(*Enter GENERAL NAYAN RAI and CHANDPAL, who is the second in command of the army.*)

Govinda

Stand here with your soldiers to prevent sacrifice of life in the temple.

Nayan

Pardon me, Sire. The King's servant is powerless in the temple of God.

Govinda

General, it is not for you to question my order. You are to carry out my words. Their merits and demerits belong only to me.

Nayan

I am your servant, my King, but I am a man above all. I have reason and my religion. I have my King,—and also my God.

Govinda

Then surrender your sword to Chandpal. He will protect the temple from pollution of blood.

Nayan Rai

Why to Chandpal? This sword was given to my forefathers by your royal ancestors. If you want it back, I will give it up to you. Be witness, my fathers, who are in the heroes' paradise,—the sword, that you made sacred with your loyal faith and bravery, I surrender to my King.

[Goes out.]

Raghupati

The Brahmin's curse has begun its work already.

(Enters JAISING.)

Jaising

The beasts have been made ready for the sacrifice.

Govinda

Sacrifice ?

Jaising

King, listen to my earnest entreaties. Do not stand in the way, hiding the Goddess, man as you are.

Raghupati

Shame, Jaising. Rise up and ask my pardon. I am your Master. Your place is at my feet, not the King's. Fool! Do you ask King's sanction to do God's service? Leave alone the worship and the sacrifice. Let us wait and see how his pride prevails in the end. Come away.

[They go out.]

(Enters APARNA.)

Aparna

Where is Jaising? He is not here, but only you,—the image whom nothing can move. You rob us of all our best without uttering a word.

We pine for love, and die beggars for want of it. Yet it comes to you unasked, though you need it not. Like a grave, you hoard it under your miserly stone, keeping it from the use of the yearning world. Jaising, what happiness do you find from her? What can she speak to you? O my heart, my famished heart!

(*Enters RAGHUPATI.*)

Raghupati

Who are you?

Aparna

I am a beggar girl. Where is Jaising?

Raghupati

Leave this place at once. I know you are haunting this temple, to steal Jaising's heart from the Goddess.

Aparna

Has the Goddess anything to fear
from me ? I fear her.

[*She goes out.*

(*Enter JAISING and PRINCE
NAKSHATRA.*)

Nakshatra

Why have you called me ?

Raghupati

Last night the Goddess told me in
a dream, that you shall become king
within a week.

Nakshatra

Ha, ha, this is news indeed.

Raghupati

Yes, you shall be king.

Nakshatra

I cannot believe it.

Raghupati

You doubt my words ?

Nakshatra

I do not want to doubt them. But suppose, by chance, it never comes to pass.

Raghupati

No, it shall be true.

Nakshatra

But, tell me, how can it ever become true ?

Raghupati

The Goddess thirsts for King's blood.

Nakshatra

King's blood ?

Raghupati

You must offer it to her before you can be king.

Nakshatra

I know not where to get it.

Raghupati

There is King Govinda.—Jaising, keep still.—Do you understand? Kill him in secret. Bring his blood, while warm, to the altar.—Jaising, leave this place if you cannot remain still,—

Nakshatra

But he is my brother, and I love him.

Raghupati

Your sacrifice will be all the more precious.

Nakshatra

But, father, I am content to remain as I am. I do not want the kingdom.

Raghupati

There is no escape for you, because the Goddess commands it. She is thirsting for blood from the King's house. If your brother is to live, then you must die.

Nakshatra

Have pity on me, father.

Raghupati

You shall never be free in life, or in death, until her bidding is done.

Nakshatra

Advise me, then, how to do it.

Raghupati

Wait in silence. I will tell you what to do when the time comes. And now, go.

[NAKSHATRA goes.]

Jaising

What is it that I heard ? Merciful Mother, is it your bidding ? To ask brother to kill brother ? Master, how could you say that it was Mother's own wish ?

Raghupati

There was no other means but this to serve my Goddess.

Jaising

Means ? Why means ? Mother, have you not your own sword to wield with your own hand ? Must your wish burrow underground, like a thief, to steal in secret ? Oh, the sin !

Raghupati

What do you know about sin ?

Jaising

What I have learnt from you.

Raghupati

Then come and learn your lesson once again from me. Sin has no meaning in reality. To kill is but to kill,—it is neither sin nor anything else. Do you not know that the dust of this earth is made of countless killings? Old Time is ever writing the chronicle of the transient life of creatures in letters of blood. Killing is in the wilderness, in the habitations of man, in birds' nests, in insects' holes, in the sea, in the sky ; there is killing for life, for sport, for nothing whatever. The world is ceaselessly killing ; and the great Goddess Kali, the spirit of ever-changing time, is standing with her thirsty tongue hanging down from her mouth, with her cup in hand, into which is running the red life-blood of the world, like juice from the crushed cluster of grapes.

Jaising

Stop, Master. Is, then, love a falsehood and mercy a mockery, and the one thing true, from beginning of time, the lust for destruction? Would it not have destroyed itself long ago? You are playing with my heart, my master. Look there, she is gazing at me with her sweet mocking smile. My bloodthirsty Mother, wilt thou accept my blood? Shall I plunge this knife into my breast and make an end to my life, as thy child, for evermore? The life-blood, flowing in these veins, is it so delicious to thee? O my Mother, my bloodthirsty Mother.—Master, did you call me? I know you wanted my heart to break its bounds in pain overflowing my Mother's feet. This is the true sacrifice. But King's blood! The Mother, who is thirsting for our love, you accuse of bloodthirstiness!

Raghupati

Then let the sacrifice be stopped in the temple.

Jaising

Yes, let it be stopped.—No, no, Master, you know what is right and what is wrong. The heart's laws are not the laws of scripture. Eyes cannot see with their own light,—the light must come from the outside. Pardon me, Master, pardon my ignorance. Tell me, father, is it true that the Goddess seeks King's blood ?

Raghupati

Alas, child, have you lost your faith in me ?

Jaising

My world stands upon my faith in you. If the Goddess must have King's blood, let me bring it to her. I will

never allow a brother to kill his brother.

Raghupati

But there can be no evil in carrying out God's wishes.

Jaising

No, it must be good, and I will earn the merit of it.

Raghupati

But, my boy, I have reared you from your childhood, and you have grown close to my heart. I can never bear to lose you, by any chance.

Jaising

I will not let your love for me be soiled with sin. Release Prince Nakshatra from his promise.

Raghupati

I shall think, and decide to-morrow.

[*He goes.*

Jaising

Deeds are better, however cruel they may be, than the hell of thinking and doubting. You are right, my master; truth is in your words. To kill is no sin, to kill brother is no sin, to kill king is no sin.—Where do you go, my brothers? To the fair at Nishipur? There the women are to dance? Oh, this world is pleasant! And the dancing limbs of the girls are beautiful. In what careless merriment the crowds flew through the roads, making the sky ring with their laughter and song. I will follow them.

(*Enters RAGHUPATI.*)

Raghupati

Jaising.

Jaising

I do not know you. I drift with the crowd. Why ask me to stop? Go your own way.

Raghupati

Jaising.

Jaising

The road is straight before me. With an alms-bowl in hand and the beggar girl as my sweetheart I shall walk on. Who says that the world's ways are difficult? Anyhow we reach the end,—the end where all laws and rules are no more, where the errors and hurts of life are forgotten, where is rest, eternal rest. What is the use of scriptures, and the teacher and his instructions?—My master, my father, what wild words are these of mine? I was living in a dream. There stands the temple, cruel and immovable as truth. What was your order, my teacher? I have not forgotten it. (*Bringing out the knife.*) I am sharpening your words in my mind, till they become one with this knife in

keenness. Have you any other order to give me ?

Raghupati

My boy, my darling, how can I tell you how deep is my love for you ?

Jaising

No, Master, do not tell me of love. Let me think only of duty. Love, like the green grass, and the trees, and life's music, is only for the surface of the world. It comes and vanishes like a dream. But underneath is duty, like the rude layers of stone, like a huge load that nothing can move.

[*They go out.*]

(*Enter GOVINDA and CHANDPAL.*)

Chandpal

Sire, I warn you to be careful.

Govinda

Why ? What do you mean ?

Chandpal

I have overheard a conspiracy to take away your life.

Govinda

Who wants my life ?

Chandpal

I am afraid to tell you, lest the news become to you more deadly than the knife itself. It was Prince Nakshatra, who—

Govinda

Nakshatra ?

Chandpal

He has promised to Raghupati to bring your blood to the Goddess.

Govinda

To the Goddess ? Then I cannot blame him. For a man loses his humanity when it concerns his gods. You go to your work and leave me alone.

[CHANDPAL *goes out.*
(*Addressing the image.*) Accept these flowers, Goddess, and let your creatures live in peace. Mother, those who are weak in this world are so helpless, and those who are strong are so cruel. Greed is pitiless, ignorance blind, and pride takes no heed when it crushes the small under its foot. Mother, do not raise your sword and lick your lips for blood ; do not set brother against brother, and woman against man. If it is your desire to strike me by the hand of one I love, then let it be fulfilled. For the sin has to ripen to its ugliest limits before it

can burst and die a hideous death ;
and when King's blood is shed by a
brother's hand, then lust for blood
will disclose its demon face, leaving
its disguise as a goddess. If such be
your wish I bow my head to it.

[JAISING *rushes in.*

Jaising

Tell me, Goddess, dost thou truly
want King's blood ? Ask it in thine
own voice, and thou shalt have it.

A voice

I want King's blood.

Jaising

King, say your last prayer, for your
time has come.

Govinda

What makes you say it, Jaising ?

Jaising

Did you not hear what the Goddess said ?

Govinda

It was not the Goddess. I heard the familiar voice of Raghupati.

Jaising

The voice of Raghupati ? No, no ! Drive me not from doubt to doubt. It is all the same, whether the voice comes from the Goddess, or from my master.—

*[He unsheathes his knife, and
then throws it away.]*

Listen to the cry of thy children, Mother. Let there be only flowers, the beautiful flowers for thy offerings,—no more blood. They are red even as blood,—these bunches of hibiscus. They have come out of the heart-burst of the earth, pained at the

slaughter of her children. Accept this. Thou must accept this. I defy thy anger. Blood thou shalt never have. Redden thine eyes. Raise thy sword. Bring thy furies of destruction. I do not fear thee.—King, leave this temple to its Goddess, and go to your men.

[GOVINDA goes.

Alas, alas, in a moment I gave up all that I had, my master, my Goddess.

[RAGHUPATI comes.

Raghupati

I have heard all. Traitor, you have betrayed your master.

Jaising

Punish me, father.

Raghupati

What punishment will you have ?

Jaising

Punish me with my life.

Raghupati

No, that is nothing. Take your oath touching the feet of the Goddess.

Jaising

I touch her feet.

Raghupati

Say, I will bring kingly blood to the altar of the Goddess, before it is midnight.

Jaising

I will bring kingly blood to the altar of the Goddess, before it is midnight.

[*They go out.*]

(*Enters GUNAVATI.*)

Gunavati

I failed. I had hoped that, if I remained hard and cold for some days, he would surrender. Such faith I

had in my power, vain woman that I am. I showed my sullen anger, and remained away from him; but it was fruitless. Woman's anger is like a diamond's glitter; it only shines, but cannot burn. I would it were like thunder, bursting upon the King's house, startling him up from his sleep, and dashing his pride to the ground.

(Enters the boy DRUVA.)

Gunavati

Where are you going ?

Druva

I am called by the King.

[Goes out.]

Gunavati

There goes the darling of the King's heart. He has robbed my unborn

children of their father's love, usurped their right to the first place in the King's breast. O Mother Kali, your creation is infinite and full of wonders, only send a child to my arms in merest whim, a tiny little warm living flesh to fill my lap, and I shall offer you whatever you wish. (*Enters NAKSHATRA.*) Prince Nakshatra, why do you turn back? I am a mere woman, weak and without weapon, am I so fearful?

Nakshatra

No, do not call me.

Gunavati

Why? What harm is in that?

Nakshatra

I do not want to be a king.

Gunavati

But why are you so excited?

Nakshatra

May the King live long, and may I die as I am,—a prince.

Gunavati

Die as quick as you can ; have I ever said anything against it ?

Nakshatra

Then tell me what you want of me.

Gunavati

The thief that steals the crown is awaiting you,—remove him. Do you understand ?

Nakshatra

Yes, except who the thief is.

Gunavati

That boy, Druva. Do you not see how he is growing in the King's lap, till one day he reaches the crown ?

Nakshatra

Yes, I have often thought of it. I have seen my brother putting his crown on the boy's head in play.

Gunavati

Playing with the crown is a dangerous game. If you do not remove the player, he will make a game of you.

Nakshatra

Yes, I like it not.

Gunavati

Offer him to Kali. Have you not heard that Mother is thirsting for blood ?

Nakshatra

But, sister, this is not my business.

Gunavati

Fool, can you feel yourself safe, so long as Mother is not appeased ?

Blood she must have ; save your own,
if you can.

Nakshatra

But she wants King's blood.

Gunavati

Who told you that ?

Nakshatra

I know it from one, to whom the
Goddess herself sends her dreams.

Gunavati

Then that boy must die for the
King. His blood is more precious to
your brother than his own, and the
King can only be saved by paying
the price, which is more than his life.

Nakshatra

I understand.

Gunavati

Then lose no time. Run after him.
He is not gone far. But remember.
Offer him in my name.

Nakshatra

Yes, I will.

Gunavati

The Queen's offerings have been
turned back from Mother's gate. Pray
to her that she may forgive me.

[*They go out.*]

(*Enters JAISING.*)

Jaising

Goddess, is there any little thing,
that yet remains, out of the wreck of
thee? If there be but a faintest
spark of thy light in the remotest of
the stars of evening, answer my cry,
though thy voice be the feeblest. Say

to me, "Child, here I am."—No, she is nowhere. She is naught. But take pity upon Jaising, O Illusion, and for him become true. Art thou so irredeemably false, that not even my love can send the slightest tremor of life through thy nothingness? O fool, for whom have you upturned your cup of life, emptying it to the last drop?—for this unanswering void,—truthless, merciless, and motherless?

(*Enters APARNA.*)

Aparna, they drive you away from the temple; yet you come back over and over again. For you are true, and truth cannot be banished. We enshrine falsehood in our temple, with all devotion; yet she is never there. Leave me not, Aparna. Sit here by my side. Why are you so sad, my darling? Do you miss some god, who is god no longer? But is

there any need of God in this little world of ours ? Let us be fearlessly godless and come closer to each other. They want our blood. And for this they have come down to the dust of our earth, leaving their magnificence of heaven. For in their heaven there are no men, no creatures, who can suffer. No, my girl, there is no Goddess.

Aparna

Then leave this temple, and come away with me.

Jaising

Leave this temple ? Yes, I will leave. Alas, Aparna, I must leave. Yet I cannot leave it, before I have paid my last dues to the—— But let that be. Come closer to me, my love. Whisper something to my ears, which will overflow this life with sweetness, flooding death itself.

Aparna

Words do not flow, when the heart
is full.

Jaising

Then lean your head on my breast.
Let the silence of two eternities, life
and death, touch each other. But no
more of this. I must go.

Aparna

Jaising, do not be cruel. Can you
not feel what I have suffered ?

Jaising

Am I cruel ? Is this your last word
to me ? Cruel, as that block of stone,
whom I called Goddess ? Aparna,
my beloved, if you were the Goddess,
you would know what fire is this that
burns my heart. But you *are* my
Goddess. Do you know how I know
it ?

Aparna

Tell me.

Jaising

You bring to me your sacrifice every moment, as a mother does to her child. God must be all sacrifice, pouring out his life in all creation.

Aparna

Jaising, come, let us leave this temple and go away together.

Jaising

Save me, Aparna, have mercy upon me and leave me. I have only one object in my life. Do not usurp its place. *[Rushes out.]*

Aparna

Again and again I have suffered. But my strength is gone. My heart breaks. *[She goes out.]*

(*Enter RAGHUPATI and PRINCE
NAKSHATRA.*)

Raghupati

Prince, where have you kept the boy ?

Nakshatra

He is in the room, where the vessels for worship are kept. He has cried himself to sleep. I think I shall never be able to bear it, when he wakes up again.

Raghupati

Jaising was of the same age when he came to me. And I remember how he cried till he slept at the feet of the Goddess,—the temple lamp dimly shining on his tear-stained child-face. It was a stormy evening like this.

Nakshatra

Father, delay not. I wish to finish it all, while he is sleeping. His cry pierces my heart like a knife.

Raghupati

I will drug him to sleep, if he wakes up.

Nakshatra

The King will soon find it out, if you are not quick. For, in the evening, he leaves the care of his kingdom to come to this boy.

Raghupati

Have more faith in the Goddess. The victim is now in her own hands and it shall never escape.

Nakshatra

But Chandpal is so watchful.

Raghupati

Not more so than our Mother.

Nakshatra

I thought I saw a shadow pass by.

Raghupati

The shadow of your own fear.

Nakshatra

Do we not hear the sound of a cry ?

Raghupati

The sound of your own heart. Shake off your despondency, Prince. Let us drink this wine duly consecrated. So long as the purpose remains in the mind, it looms large and fearful. In action it becomes small. The vapour is dark and diffused. It dissolves into water drops, that are small and sparkling. Prince, it is nothing. It takes only a moment,—not more than it does to snuff a candle. That life's light will die in a flash, like lightning in the stormy night of July, leaving its thunderbolt for ever deep in the King's pride. But, Prince, why are you so silent ?

Nakshatra

I think we should not be too rash.
Leave this work till to-morrow night.

Raghupati

To-night is as good as to-morrow
night, perhaps better.

Nakshatra

Listen to the sound of footsteps.

Raghupati

I do not hear it.

Nakshatra

See there,—the light.

Raghupati

The King comes. I fear we have
delayed too long.

(KING comes with attendants.)

Govinda

Make them prisoners. (To RAGHUPATI) Have you anything to say ?

Raghupati

Nothing.

Govinda

Do you admit your crime !

Raghupati

Crime ? Yes, my crime was that, in my weakness, I delayed in carrying out Mother's service. The punishment comes from the Goddess. You are merely her instrument.

Govinda

According to my law, my soldiers shall escort you to exile, Raghupati, where you shall spend eight years of your life.

Raghupati

King, I never bent my knees to any mortal in my life. I am a Brahmin. Your caste is lower than mine. Yet, in all humility, I pray to you, give me only one day's time.

Govinda

I grant it.

Raghupati

(*Mockingly.*) You are the King of all kings. Your majesty and mercy are alike immeasurable. Whereas I am a mere worm, hiding in the dust.
[*He goes out.*]

Govinda

Nakshatra, admit your guilt.

Nakshatra

I am guilty, Sire, and I dare not ask for your pardon.

Govinda

Prince, I know you are tender of heart. Tell me, who beguiled you with evil counsel ?

Nakshatra

I will not take other names, King. My guilt is my own. You have pardoned your foolish brother more than once, and once more he begs to be pardoned.

Govinda

Nakshatra, leave my feet. The judge is still more bound by his laws than his prisoner.

Attendants

Sire, remember that he is your brother, and pardon him.

Govinda

Let me remember that I am a king. Nakshatra shall remain in exile for

eight years, in the house we have built, by the sacred river, outside the limits of Tripura. [*Taking NAKSHATRA'S hands.*] The punishment is not yours only, brother, but also mine,—the more so because I cannot share it bodily. The vacancy that you leave in the palace will prick my heart, every day, with a thousand needles. May the gods be more friendly to you, while you are away from us.

[*They all go out.*]

(*Enter RAGHUPATI and JAISING.*)

Raghupati

My pride wallows in the mire. I have shamed my Brahminhood. I am no longer your master, my child. Yesterday I had the authority to command you. To-day I can only beg your favour. That light is extinct in me, which gave me the right

to defy King's power. The earthen lamp can be replenished and lighted again and again, but the star once extinguished is lost for ever. I am that lost star. Life's days are mere tinsel, most trifling of God's gifts, and I had to beg for one of those days from the King with bent knees. Let that one day be not in vain. Let its infamous black brows be red with King's blood before it dies. Why do you not speak, my boy? Though I forsake my place as your master, yet have I not the right to claim your obedience as your father,—I who am more than a father to you, because father to an orphan? But that man is the most miserable of all beggars, who has to beg for love. You are still silent, my child? Then let my knees bend to you, who were smaller than my knees when you first came to my arms.

Jaising

Father, do not torture the heart that is already broken. If the Goddess thirsts for kingly blood, I will bring it to her before to-night. I will pay all my debts, yes, every farthing. Keep ready for my return. I will delay not. [Goes out.

[*Storm outside.*]

Raghupati

She is awake at last, the Terrible. Her curses go shrieking through the town. The hungry furies are shaking the cracking branches of the world-tree with all their might, for the stars to break and drop. My Mother, why didst thou keep thine own people in doubt and dishonour so long? Leave it not for thy servant to raise thy sword. Let thy mighty arm do its own work!—I hear steps.

(*Enters APARNA.*)

Aparna

Where is Jaising ?

Raghupati

Away, evil omen. (*APARNA goes out.*) But if Jaising never comes back ? No, he will not break his promise. Victory to thee, Great Kali, the giver of all success !—But if he meet with obstruction ? If he be caught and lose his life at the guards' hands ?—Victory to thee, watchful Goddess, Mother invincible ! Do not allow thy repute to be lost, and thine enemies to laugh at thee. If thy children must lose their pride and faith in their Mother, and bow down their heads in shame before the rebels, who then will remain in this orphaned world to carry thy banner ?—I hear his steps. But so soon ? Is he com-

ing back foiled in his purpose ? No, that cannot be. Thy miracle needs not time, O Mistress of all time, terrible with thy necklace of human skulls.

[JAISING *rushes in.*

Jaising, where is the blood ?

Jaising

It is with me. Let go my hands, Let me offer it myself (*entering the temple*). Must thou have kingly blood, Great Mother, who nourishest the world at thy breast with life ?—I am of the royal caste, a Kshatriya. My ancestors have sat upon thrones, and there are rulers of men in my mother's line. I have kingly blood in my veins. Take it, and quench thy thirst for ever.

[*Stabs himself, and falls.*

Raghupati

Jaising ! O cruel, ungrateful ! You have done the blackest crime. You

kill your father !—Jaising, forgive me, my darling. Come back to my heart, my heart's one treasure ! Let me die in your place.

(*Enters APARNA.*)

Aparna

It will madden me. Where is Jaising ? Where is he ?

Raghupati

Come, Aparna, come, my child, call him with all your love. Call him back to life. Take him to you, away from me, only let him live.

[APARNA *enters the temple and swoons. (Beating his forehead on the temple floor.)* Give him, give him, give him ! —Give him back to me ! (*Stands up addressing the image.*) Look how she stands there, the silly stone,—deaf, dumb, blind,—the whole sorrow-

ing world weeping at her door,—the noblest hearts wrecking themselves at her stony feet. Give me back my Jaising. Oh, it is all in vain. Our bitterest cries wander in emptiness,—the emptiness that we vainly try to fill with these stony images of delusion. Away with them ! Away with these our impotent dreams, that harden into stones, burdening our world !

[He throws away the image, and comes out into the courtyard.]

(Enters GUNAVATI.)

Gunavati

Victory to thee, great Goddess !—
But, where is the Goddess ?

Raghupati

Goddess there is none.

Gunavati

Bring her back, father. I have brought her my offerings. I have

come at last, to appease her anger with my own heart's blood. Let her know that the Queen is true to her promise. Have pity on me, and bring back the Goddess only for this night. Tell me,—where is she ?

Raghupati

She is nowhere,—neither above, nor below.

Gunavati

Master, was not the Goddess here in the temple ?

Raghupati

Goddess ?—If there were any true Goddess anywhere in the world, could she bear this thing to usurp her name ?

Gunavati

Do not torture me. Tell me truly. Is there no Goddess ?

Raghupati

No, there is none.

Gunavati

Then who was here ?

Raghupati

Nothing, nothing.

[APARNA comes out from the temple.]

Aparna

Father !

Raghupati

My sweet child ! “ Father,”—did you say ? Do you rebuke me with that name ? My son, whom I have killed, has left that one dear call behind him in your sweet voice.

Aparna

Father, leave this temple. Let us go away from here.

(*Enters the KING.*)

Govinda

Where is the Goddess ?

Raghupati

The Goddess is nowhere.

Govinda

But what blood-stream is this ?

Raghupati

King, Jaising, who loved you so
dearly, has killed himself.

Govinda

Killed himself ? Why ?

Raghupati

To kill the falsehood, that sucks the
life-blood of man

Govinda

Jaising is great. He has conquered death. My flowers are for him.

Gunavati

My King.

Govinda

Yes, my love.

Gunavati

The Goddess is no more.

Govinda

She has burst her cruel prison of stone, and come back to the woman's heart.

Aparna

Father, come away.

Raghupati

Come, child. Come, Mother. I have found thee. Thou art the last gift of Jaising.

THE KING AND THE
QUEEN

TO
MRS. ARTHUR SEYMOUR

THE KING AND THE QUEEN

ACT I

*The Palace Garden. KING VIKRAM
and QUEEN SUMITRA.*

Vikram

Why have you delayed in coming
to me for so long, my love ?

Sumitra

Do you not know, my King, that
I am utterly yours, wherever I am ?
It was your house, and its service,
that kept me away from your presence,
but not from you.

Vikram

Leave the house, and its service,
alone. My heart cannot spare you

for my world, I am jealous of its claims.

Sumitra

No, King, I have my place in your heart, as your beloved, and in your world, as your Queen.

Vikram

Alas, my darling, where have vanished those days of unalloyed joy, when we first met in love; when our world awoke not,—only the flush of the early dawn of our union broke through our hearts in overflowing silence? You had sweet shyness in your eyelids, like a dew-drop on the tip of a flower-petal, and the smile flickered on your lips like a timid evening lamp in the breeze. I remember the eager embrace of your love, when the morning broke and we had to part, and your unwilling steps, heavy with languor, that took you

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away from me. Where were the house, and its service, and the cares of your world ?

Sumitra

But then we were scarcely more than a boy and a girl ; and to-day we are the King and the Queen.

Vikram

The King and the Queen ? Mere names. We are more than that ; we are lovers.

Sumitra

You are my King, my husband, and I am content to follow your steps. Do not shame me by putting me before your kingship.

Vikram

Do you not want my love ?

Sumitra

Love me truly by not making your love extravagant ; for truth can afford to be simple.

Vikram

I do not understand woman's heart.

Sumitra

King, if you thriftlessly squander your all upon me, then I shall be deprived.

Vikram

No more vain words, Queen. The birds' nests are silent with love. Let lips keep guard upon lips, and allow not words to clamour.

(*Enters ATTENDANT.*)

Attendant

The minister begs audience, to discuss a grave matter of state.

Vikram

No, not now. [ATTENDANT *goes*.

Sumitra

Sire, ask him to come.

Vikram

The state and its matter can wait.
But sweet leisure comes rarely. It is
frail, like a flower. Respite from duty
is a part of duty.

Sumitra

Sire, I beg of you, attend to your
work.

Vikram

Again, cruel woman. Do you
imagine that I always follow you to
win your unwilling favour, drop by
drop? I leave you and go.

[*He goes*.

(*Enter DEVADATTA, the King's
Brahmin friend.*)

Sumitra

Tell me, sir, what is that noise outside the gate ?

Devadatta

That noise ? Command me, and with the help of soldiers I shall drive away that noise, ragged and hungry.

Sumitra

Do not mock me. Tell me what has happened.

Devadatta

Nothing. It is merely hunger,—the vulgar hunger of poverty. The famished horde of barbarians is rudely clamouring, making the drowsy cuckoos in your royal garden start up in fear.

Sumitra

Tell me, father, who are hungry ?

Devadatta

It is their ill-fate. The King's poor subjects have been practising long to live upon half a meal a day, but they have not yet become experts in complete starvation. It is amazing.

Sumitra

But, father, the land is smiling with ripe corn. Why should the King's subjects die of hunger ?

Devadatta

The corn is his, whose is the land,—it is not for the poor. They, like intruding dogs at the King's feast, crouch in the corner for their crumbs, or kicks.

Sumitra

Does it mean that there is no King in this land ?

Devadatta

Not one, but hundreds.

Sumitra

Are not the King's officers watchful ?

Devadatta

Who can blame your officers ? They came penniless from the alien land. Is it to bless the King's subjects with their empty hands ?

Sumitra

From the alien land ? Are they my relatives ?

Devadatta

Yes, Queen.

Sumitra

What about Jaisen ?

Devadatta

He rules the province of Singarh with such scrupulous care that all the rubbish, in the shape of food and raiment, has been cleared away ; only the skin and bones remain.

Sumitra

And Shila ?

Devadatta

He keeps his eyes upon the trade ; he relieves all merchants of their excessive profits, taking the burden upon his own broad shoulders.

Sumitra

And Ajit ?

Devadatta

He lives in Vijaykote. He smiles sweetly, strokes the land on its back with his caressing hand, and whatever comes to his touch gathers with care.

Sumitra

What shame is this! I must remove this refuse from my father's land and save my people. Leave me now, the King comes. (*Enters the KING.*) I am the mother of my people. I cannot bear their cry. Save them, King.

Vikram

What do you want me to do ?

Sumitra

Turn those out from your kingdom who are oppressing the land.

Vikram

Do you know who they are ?

Sumitra

Yes, I know.

Vikram

They are your own cousins.

Sumitra

They are not a whit more my own
than my people. They are robbers,
who, under the cover of your throne,
seek for their victims.

Vikram

They are Jaisen, Shila, Ajit.

Sumitra

My country must be rid of them.

Vikram

They will not move without fight.

Sumitra

Then fight them, Sire.

Vikram

Fight ? But let me conquer *you*
first, and then I shall have time to
conquer my enemies.

Sumitra

Allow me, King, as your Queen. I will save your subjects myself.

[*Goes.*

Vikram

This is how you make my heart distraught. You sit alone upon your peak of greatness, where I do not reach you. You go to attend your own God, and I go seeking you in vain.

(*Enters DEVADATTA.*)

Devadatta

Where is the Queen, Sire ? Why are you alone ?

Vikram

Brahmin, this is all your conspiracy. You come here to talk of the state news to the Queen ?

Devadatta

The state is shouting its own news loud enough to reach the Queen's ears. It has come to that pass, when it takes no heed lest your rest be broken. Do not be afraid of me, King. I have come to ask my Brahmin's dues from the Queen. For my wife is out of humour, her larder is empty, and in the house there are a number of empty stomachs. [*He goes.*]

Vikram

I wish all happiness to my people. Why should there be suffering and injustice? Why should the strong cast his vulture's eyes upon the poor man's comforts, pitifully small? (*Enters MINISTER.*) Banish all the foreign robbers from my kingdom this moment. I must not hear the cry of the oppressed for a day longer.

Minister

But, King, the evil that has been slowly growing for long, you cannot uproot in a day.

Vikram

Strike at its root with vigour, and fell it with your axe in a day,—the tree that has taken a hundred years to grow.

Minister

But we want arms and soldiers.

Vikram

Where is my general ?

Minister

He himself is a foreigner.

Vikram

Then invite the hungry people. Open my treasure ; stop this cry with

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food ; send them away with money,—
And if they want to have my kingdom, let them do so in peace, and be happy. [*He goes.*]

(*Enter SUMITRA and DEVADATTA.*)

Minister

Queen, my humble salutation to you.

Queen

We cannot allow misery to go unchecked in our land.

Minister

What are your commands, Queen ?

Queen

Call immediately, in my name, all our chiefs who are foreigners.

Minister

I have done so already. I have taken upon myself to invite them

into the capital, in the King's name, without asking for his sanction, for fear of refusal.

Queen

When did you send your messengers?

Minister

It will soon be a month hence. I am expecting their answers every moment. But I am afraid they will not respond.

Queen

Not respond to the King's call ?

Devadatta

The King has become a piece of wild rumour, which they can believe, or not, as they like.

Queen

Keep your soldiers ready, Minister, for these people. They shall have to answer to me, as my relatives.

[*The MINISTER goes.*

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Devadatta

Queen, they will not come.

Queen

Then the King shall fight them.

Devadatta

The King will not fight.

Queen

Then I will.

Devadatta

You !

Queen

I will go to my brother Kumarsen, Kashmir's King, and with his help fight these rebels, who are a disgrace to Kashmir. Father, help me to escape from this kingdom, and do your duty, if things come to the worst.

Devadatta

I salute thee, Mother of the people.

[*He goes.*]

(*Enters VIKRAM.*)

Vikram

Why do you go away, Queen ? My hungry desire is revealed to you in its naked poverty. Do you therefore go away from me in derision ?

Sumitra

I feel shamed to share alone your heart, which is for all men.

Vikram

Is it absolutely true, Queen, that you stand on your giddy height, and I grovel in the dust ? No. I know my power. There is an unconquerable force in my nature, which I have turned into love for you.

Sumitra

Hate me, King, hate me. Forget me. I shall bear it bravely,—but do

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not wreck your manhood against a woman's charms.

Vikram

So much love, yet such neglect ?
Your very indifference, like a cruel
knife, cuts into my bosom, laying bare
the warm bleeding love,—and then,
to fling it into the dust !

Sumitra

I throw myself at your feet, my
beloved. Have you not forgiven your
Queen, again and again, for wrongs
done ? Then why is this wrath, Sire,
when I am blameless ?

King

Rise up, my love. Come to my
heart. Shut my life from all else for
a moment, with your encircling arms,
rounding it into a world completely
your own.

A voice from outside

Queen.

Sumitra

It is Devadatta.—Yes, father, what is the message ?

(Enters DEVADATTA.)

Devadatta

They have defied the King's call,—the foreign governors of the provinces,—and they are preparing for rebellion.

Sumitra

Do you hear, King ?

Vikram

Brahmin, the palace garden is not the council-house.

Devadatta

Sire, we rarely meet our King in the council-house, because it is not the palace garden.

Queen

The miserable dogs, grown fat upon the King's table-sweepings, dare dream of barking against their master? King, is it time for debating in the council-chamber? Is not the course clear before you? Go with your soldiers and crush these miscreants.

Vikram

But our general himself is a foreigner.

Queen

Go yourself.

Vikram

Am I your misfortune, Queen,—a bad dream, a thorn in your flesh? No, I will never move a step from here. I will offer them terms of peace. Who is it that has caused this mischief? The Brahmin and the woman conspired to wake up the

sleeping snake from its hole. Those who are too feeble to protect themselves are the most thoughtless in causing disasters to others.

Queen

Oh the unfortunate land, and the unfortunate woman who is the Queen of this land.

Vikram

Where are you going ?

Queen

I am going to leave you.

Vikram

Leave me ?

Queen

Yes. I am going to fight the rebels.

Vikram

Woman, you mock me.

Queen

I take my farewell.

King

You dare not leave me.

Queen

I dare not stay by your side when
I weaken you.

King

Go, proud woman. I will never
ask you to turn back,—but claim no
help from me. [QUEEN goes.

Devadatta

King, you allow her to go alone ?

King

She is not going. I do not believe
her words.

Devadatta

I think she is in earnest.

King

It is her woman's wiles. She threatens me, while she wants to spur me into action; and I despise her methods. She must not think that she can play with my love. She shall regret it. Oh my friend, must I learn my lesson at last, that love is not for the King,—and learn it from that woman, whom I love like my doom? Devadatta, you have grown with me from infancy,—can you not forget, for a moment, that I am a king, and feel that I have a man's heart that knows pain?

Devadatta

My heart is yours, my friend, which is not only ready to receive your love, but your anger.

King

But why do you invite the snake
into my nest ?

Devadatta

Your house was on fire,—I merely
brought the news, and wakened you
up. Am I to blame for that ?

King

What is the use of waking ? When
all are mere dreams, let me choose my
own little dream, if I can, and then
die. Fifty years hence, who will re-
member the joys and sorrows of this
moment ? Go, Devadatta, leave me
to my kingly loneliness of pain.

(Enters a COURTIER who is a foreigner.)

Courtier

We ask justice from your hands,
King,—we, who came to this land
with the Queen.

King

Justice for what ?

Courtier

It has come to our ears that false accusations against us are brought before you, for no other cause than that we are foreigners.

King

Who knows, if they are not true ? But so long as I trust you, can you not remain silent ? Have I ever insulted you with the least suspicion—the suspicions that are bred like maggots in the rotten hearts of cowards ? Treason I do not fear. I can crush it under my feet. But I fear to nourish littleness in my own mind.—You can leave me now. *[The COURTIER goes.]*

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(*Enter MINISTER and DEVADATTA.*)

Minister

Sire, the Queen has left the palace,
riding on her horse.

King

What do you say? Left my
palace?

Minister

Yes, King.

King

Why did you not stop her?

Minister

She left in secret.

King

Who brought you the news?

Minister

The priest. He saw her riding
before the palace temple.

King

Send for him.

Minister

But, Sire, she cannot be far. She has only just left. You can yet bring her back.

King

Bringing her back is not important. The great fact is that she left me.—Left me ! And all the King's soldiers and forts, and prisons and iron chains, could not keep fast this little heart of a woman.

Minister

Aias, King. Calumny, like a flood-burst, when the dyke is broken, will rush in from all sides.

King

Calumny ! Let the people's tongues rot with their own poison.

Devadatta

In the days of eclipse, men dare look at the midday sun through their broken pieces of glass, blackened with soot. Great Queen, your name will be soiled, tossed from mouth to mouth, but your light will ever shine far above all soiling.

King

Bring the priest to me. (MINISTER goes.) I can yet go to seek her, and bring her back. But is this my eternal task? That she should always avoid me, and I should ever run after the fugitive heart? Take your flight, woman, day and night, homeless, loveless, without rest and peace. (*Enters* PRIEST.) Go, go, I have heard enough, I do not want to know more. (*The* PRIEST *is about to go.*) Come back.—Tell me, did she come

down to the temple to pray with tears in her eyes ?

Priest

No, Sire. Only, for a moment, she checked her horse and turned her face to the temple, bowing her head low, —then rode away fast as lightning. I cannot say if she had tears in her eyes. The light from the temple was dim.

King

Tears in her eyes ? You could not even imagine such enormity ? Enough. You may go. (*The PRIEST goes.*) My God, you know that all the wrong that I have done to her was that I loved her. I was willing to lose my heaven and my kingdom for her love. But they have not betrayed me, only she has.

(*Enters* MINISTER.)

Minister

Sire, I have sent messengers on horseback in pursuit of her.

King

Call them back. The dream has fled away. Where can your messengers find it? Get ready my army. I will go to war myself, and crush the rebellion.

Minister

As you command. [*Goes away.*]

Vikram

Devadatta, why do you sit silent and sad? The thief has fled, leaving the booty behind, and now I pick up my freedom. This is a moment of rejoicing to me. False, false friend, false are my words. Cruel pain pierces my heart.

Devadatta

You shall have no time for pain, or for love, now,—your life will become one stream of purpose, and carry your kingly heart to its great conquest.

Vikram

But I am not yet completely freed in my heart. I still believe she will soon come back to me, when she finds that the world is not her lover, and that man's heart is the only world for a woman. She will know what she has spurned, when she misses it ; and my time will come when, her pride gone, she comes back, and jealously begins to woo me.

(*Enters ATTENDANT.*)

Attendant

A letter from the Queen.

[*Gives the letter, and goes.*]

King

She relents already. (*Reads the letter.*) Only this. Just two lines, to say that she is going to her brother in Kashmir, to ask him to help her to quell the rebellion in my kingdom. This is insult ! Help from Kashmir !

Devadatta

Lose no time in forestalling her,—and let that be your revenge.

King

My revenge ? You shall know it.

ACT II

Tent in Kashmir

(VIKRAM and the GENERAL.)

General

Pardon me, King, if I dare offer you advice in the interest of your kingdom.

Vikram

Speak to me.

General

The rebellion in our land has been quelled. The rebels themselves are fighting on your side. Why waste our strength and time in Kashmir when your presence in your own capital is so urgently needed ?

Vikram

The fight here is not over yet.

General

But Kumarsen, the Queen's brother, is already punished for his sister's temerity. His army is routed, he is hiding for his life. His uncle, Chandrasen, is only too eager to be seated upon the vacant throne. Make him the king, and leave this unfortunate country to peace.

Vikram

It is not for punishment that I stay here ; it is for fight. The fight has become like a picture to a painter. I must add bold lines, blend strong colours, and perfect it every day. My mind grows more and more immersed in it, as it blossoms into forms ; and I leave it with a sigh when it is finished. The destruction is merely its materials, out of which it takes its shape. It is a creation. It is beautiful as red bunches of *palash*, that break

out like a drunken fury, yet every one of its flowers delicately perfect.

General

But, Sire, this cannot go on for ever. You have other duties. The minister has been sending me message after message, entreating me to help you to see how this war is ruining your country.

Vikram

I cannot see anything else in the world but what is growing under my masterly hands. Oh, the music of swords! Oh, the great battles, that clasp your breast tight like hard embraces of love! Go, General, you have other works to do,—your advices flash out best on the points of your swords. (GENERAL goes.) This is deliverance. The bondage has fled of itself, leaving the prisoner free. Revenge is stronger than the thin

wine of love. Revenge is freedom,—
freedom from the coils of cloying
sweetness.

(Enters GENERAL.)

General

I can espy a carriage coming towards
our tent, perhaps bringing an envoy
of peace. It has no escort of armed
soldiers.

King

Peace must follow the war. The
time for it has not yet come.

General

Let us hear the messenger first, and
then,—

King

And then continue the war.

(Enters a SOLDIER.)

Soldier

The Queen has come asking for your
audience.

Vikram

What do you say ?

Soldier

The Queen has come.

Vikram

Which Queen ?

Soldier

Our Queen, Sumitra.

Vikram

Go, General, see who has come.

[*The GENERAL and the SOLDIER go.*

King

This is the third time that she has come, vainly attempting to coax me away, since I have carried war into Kashmir. But these are no dreams—these battles. To wake up suddenly,

and then find again the same palace gardens, the flowers, the Queen, the long days made of sighs and small favours! No, a thousand times, no. She has come to make me captive, to take me as her trophy from the war-field into her palace hall. She may as well try to capture the thunderstorms.

(*Enters GENERAL.*)

General

Yes, Sire, it is our own Queen who wants to see you. It breaks my heart that I cannot allow her to come freely into your presence.

King

This is neither the time, nor the place, to see a woman.

General

But, Sire.

King

No, no. Tell my guards to keep a strict watch at my tent door,—not for enemies, but for women.

[GENERAL *goes*.

(*Enters SHANKAR.*)

Shankar

I am Shankar,—King Kumarsen's servant. You have kept me captive in your tent.

King

Yes, I know you.

Shankar

Your Queen waits outside your tent.

King

She will have to wait for me farther away.

Shankar

It makes me blush to say that she has come humbly to ask your pardon ; or, if that is impossible, to accept her punishment from your hand. For she owns that she alone was to blame,—and she asks you, in the name of all that is sacred, to spare her brother's country and her brother.

King

But you must know, old man, it is war,—and this war is with her brother, and not herself. I have no time to discuss the rights and wrongs of the question with a woman. But, being a man, you ought to know that when once a war is started, rightly or wrongly, it is our man's pride that must carry it on to the end.

Shankar

But do you know, Sire, you are carrying on this war with a woman, and she is your Queen? Our King is merely espousing her cause, being her brother. I ask you, is it king-like, or man-like, to magnify a domestic quarrel into a war, carrying it from country to country?

King

I warn you, old man, your tongue is becoming dangerous. You may tell the Queen, in my name, that when her brother, Kumarsen, owns his defeat and surrenders himself into our hands, the question of pardoning will then be discussed.

Shankar

That is as impossible as for the morning sun to kiss the dust of the

western horizon. My King will never surrender himself alive into your hands, and his sister will never suffer it.

King

Then the war must continue. But do you not think that bravery ceases to be bravery at a certain point, and becomes mere foolhardiness? Your King can never escape me. I have surrounded him on all sides, and he knows it.

Shankar

Yes, he knows it, and also knows that there is a great gap.

King

What do you mean?

Shankar

I mean death,—the triumphal gate through which he will escape you, if I know him right. And there waits his revenge.

[*He goes.*

(*Enters ATTENDANT.*)

Sire, Chandrasen, and his wife Revati, Kumarsen's uncle and aunt, have come to see you.

King

Ask them in.

(*Enter CHANDRASEN and REVATI.*)

King

My obeisance to you both.

Chandrasen

May you live long.

Revati

May you be victorious.

Chandrasen

What punishment have you decided for him ?

King

If he surrenders I shall pardon him.

Revati

Only this, and nothing more ? If tame pardon comes at the end, then why is there such preparation ? Kings are not overgrown children, and war is no mere child's play.

Vikram

To rob was not my purpose, but to restore my honour. The head that bears the crown cannot bear insult.

Chandrasen

My son, forgive him. For he is mature neither in age nor in wisdom. You may deprive him of his right to the throne, or banish him, but spare him his life.

King

I never wished to take his life.

Revati

Then why such an army and arms ?
You kill the soldiers, who have done
you no harm, and spare him who is
guilty ?

Vikram

I do not understand you.

Chandrasen

It is nothing. She is angry with
Kumarsen for having brought our
country into trouble, and for giving
you just cause for anger, who are so
nearly related to us.

Vikram

Justice will be meted out to him
when he is captured.

Revati

I have come to ask you never to suspect that we are hiding him. It is the people. Burn their crops and their villages, — drive them with hunger, and then they will bring him out.

Chandrasen

Gently, wife, gently. Come to the palace, son, the reception of Kashmir awaits you there.

King

You go there now, and I shall follow you. (*They go out.*) Oh, the red flame of hell-fire. The greed and hatred in a woman's heart. Did I catch a glimpse of my own face in her face, I wonder? Are there lines like those on my forehead, the burnt tracks made by a hidden fire? Have my lips grown as thin and curved at

both ends as hers, like some murderer's knife ? No, my passion is for war,—it is neither for greed nor for cruelty ; its fire is like love's fire, that knows no-restraint, that counts no cost, that burns itself, and all that it touches, either into a flame, or to ashes.

(*Enters ATTENDANT.*)

Attendant

The Brahmin, Devadatta, has come, awaiting your pleasure.

King

Devadatta has come ? Bring him in,—No, no, stop. Let me think,—I know him. He has come to turn me back from the battle-field. Brahmin, you undermined the river banks, and now, when the water overflows, you piously pray that it may irrigate your fields, and then tamely go back. Will

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it not wash away your houses, and ruin the country? The joy of the terrible is blind,—its term of life is short, and it must gather its plunder in fearful haste, like a mad elephant uprooting the lotus from the pond. Wise counsels will come, in their turn, when the great force is spent,—No, I must not see the Brahmin.

(Enters AMARU, the chieftain of Trichur hills.)

Amaru

Sire, I have come at your bidding, and I own you as my King.

King

You are the chief of this place?

Amaru

Yes. I am the chief of Trichur. You are the King of many kings, and

I am your servant. I have a daughter, whose name is Ila. She is young and comely. Do not think me vain, when I say that she is worthy to be your spouse. She is waiting outside. Permit me, King, and I shall send her to you as the best greeting of this land of flowers. [*He goes out.*]

(*Enters ILA with her ATTENDANT.*)

King

Ah ! She comes, as a surprise of dawn, when the moment before it seemed like a dark night. Come, maiden, you have made the battlefield forget itself. Kashmir has shot her best arrow, at last, to pierce the heart of the war-god. You make me feel that my eyes had been wandering among the wilderness of things, to find at last their fulfilment. But why do you stand so silent, with your eyes on the ground ? I can almost see a

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trembling of pain in your limbs, whose intensity makes it invisible.

Ila

(*Kneeling.*) I have heard that you are a great King. Be pleased to grant me my prayer.

King

Rise up, fair maiden. This earth is not worthy to be touched by your feet. Why do you kneel in the dust? There is nothing that I cannot grant you.

Ila

My father has given me to you. I beg myself back from your hands. You have wealth untold, and territories unlimited,—go and leave me behind in the dust; there is nothing that you can want.

King

Is there, indeed, nothing that I can

want ? How shall I show you my heart ? Where is its wealth ? Where are its territories ? It is empty. Had I no kingdom, but only you——

Ila

Then first take my life,—as you take that of the wild deer of the forest, piercing her heart with your arrows,——

King

But why, child,—why such contempt for me ? Am I so utterly unworthy of you ? I have won kingdoms with the might of my arms. Can I not hope to beg your heart for me ?

Ila

But my heart is not mine. I have given it to one who left me months ago, promising to come back and meet me in the shade of our ancient forest. Days pass, and I wait, and the silence

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of the forest grows wistful. If he find me not, when he comes back ! If he go away for ever, and the forest shadows keep their ancient watch for the love-meeting that remains eternally unfulfilled ! King, do not take me away,—leave me for him, who has left me, to find me again.

Vikram

What a fortunate man is he. But I warn you, girl, gods are jealous of our love. Listen to my secret. There was a time when I despised the whole world, and only loved. I woke up from my dream, and found that the world was there,—only my love burst as a bubble. What is his name, for whom you wait ?

Ila

He is Kashmir's King. His name is Kumarsen.

Vikram

Kumarsen !

Ila

Do you know him ? He is known to all. Kashmir has given its heart to him.

Vikram

Kumarsen ? Kashmir's King ?

Ila

Yes. He must be your friend.

Vikram

But do you not know that the sun of his fortune has set ? Give up all hope of him. He is like a hunted animal, running and hiding from one hole to another. The poorest beggar in these hills is happier than he.

Ila

I hardly understand you, King.

Vikram

You women sit in the seclusion of your hearts and only love. You do not know how the roaring torrent of the world passes by, and we men are carried away in its waves in all directions. With your sad, big eyes, filled with tears, you sit and watch, clinging to flimsy hope. But learn to despair, my child.

Ila

Tell me the truth, King. Do not deceive me. I am so very little and so trivial. But I am all his own. Where,—in what homeless wilds,—is my lover roaming? I will go to seek him,—I, who never have been out of my house. Show me the way,—

Vikram

His enemy's soldiers are after him,—he is doomed.

Ila

But are you not his friend ? Will you not save him ? A king is in danger, and will you suffer it as a King ? Are you not honour-bound to succour him ? I know that all the world loved him. But where are they, in his time of misfortune ? Sire, you are great in power, but what is your power for, if you do not help the great ? Can you keep yourself aloof ? Then show me the way,—I will offer my life for him,—the one, weak woman.

Vikram

Love him, love him with all you have—Love him, who is the King of your precious heart. I have lost my love's heaven myself,—but let me have the happiness to make you happy. I will not covet your love.—The withered branch cannot hope to

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blossom with borrowed flowers. Trust me. I am your friend. I will bring him to you.

Ila

Noble King. I owe you my life and my heaven of happiness.

Vikram

Go, and be ready with your bridal dress. I will change the tune of my music. (*ILA goes.*) This war is growing tiresome. But peace is insipid. Homeless fugitive, you are more fortunate than I am. Woman's love, like heaven's watchful eyes, follows you wherever you go in this world, making your defeat a triumph and misfortune splendid, like sunset clouds.

(*Enters DEVADATTA.*)

Devadatta

Save me from my pursuers.

King

Who are they ?

Devadatta

They are your guards, King. They kept me under strict watch for this everlasting half-hour. I talked to them of art and letters ; they were amused. They thought I was playing the fool to please them. Then I began to recite to them the best lyrics of Kalidas,—and it soothed this pair of yokels to sleep. In perfect disgust, I left their tent to come to you.

King

These guards should be punished for their want of taste in going off to sleep when the prisoner recited Kalidas.

Devadatta

We shall think of the punishment

later on. In the meanwhile, we must leave this miserable war and go back home. Once I used to think that only they died of love's separation, who were the favoured of fortune, delicately nurtured. But since I left home to come here, I have discovered that even a poor Brahmin is not too small to fall a victim to angered love.

Vikram

Love and death are not too careful in their choice of victims. They are impartial. Yes, friend, let us go back home. Only I have one thing to do before I leave this place. Try to find out, from the chief of Trichur, Kumarsen's hiding-place. Tell him, when you find him, that I am no longer his enemy. And, friend, if somebody else is there with him,—if you meet her,—

Devadatta

Yes, yes, I know. She is ever in

our thoughts, yet she is beyond our words. She, who is noble, her sorrow has to be great.

Vikram

Friend, you have come to me like the first sudden breeze of spring. Now my flowers will follow, with all the memories of the past happy years.

[DEVADATTA goes.

(*Enters CHANDRASEN.*)

Vikram

I have glad tidings for you. I have pardoned Kumarsen.

Chandrasen

You may have pardoned him,—but now that I represent Kashmir, he must await his country's judgment at my hands. He shall have his punishment from me.

Vikram

What punishment ?

Chandrasen

He shall be deprived of his throne.

Vikram

Impossible. His throne I will restore to him.

Chandrasen

What right have you in Kashmir's throne ?

Vikram

The right of the victorious. This throne is now mine, and I will give it to him.

Chandrasen

You give it to him ! Do I not know proud Kumarsen, from his infancy ? Do you think he will accept his father's throne as a gift from you ? He can bear your vengeance, but not your generosity.

(*Enters a MESSENGER.*)

Messenger

The news has reached us that Kumarsen is coming in a closed carriage to surrender himself.

[*Goes out.*]

Chandrasen

Incredible ! The lion comes to beg his chains ! Is life so precious ?

Vikram

But why does he come in a closed carriage ?

Chandrasen

How can he show himself ? The eyes of the crowd in the streets will pierce him, like arrows, to the quick. King, put out the lamp, when he comes, receive him in darkness. Do not let him suffer the insult of the light.

(*Enters DEVADATTA.*)

Devadatta

I hear that the King, Kumarsen, is coming to see you of his own will.

Vikram

I will receive him with solemn rituals,—with you as our priest. Ask my general to employ his soldiers to make preparation for a wedding festival.

(*Enter the BRAHMIN ELDERS.*)

All

Victory be to you.

First Elder

We hear that you have invited our King, to restore him to his throne,—Therefore we have come to bless you for

(*Enters SHANKAR.*)

the joy that you have given to Kashmir.

[They bless him, and the KING bows to them. The BRAHMINs go out.]

Shankar

(*To CHANDRASEN.*) Sire, is it true that Kumarsen is coming to surrender himself to his enemies ?

Chandrasen

Yes, it is true.

Shankar

Worse than a thousand lies. Oh my beloved King, I am your old servant, I have suffered pain that only God knows, yet never complained. But how can I bear this ? That you should travel through all the roads of Kashmir to enter your cage of prison ? Why did not your servant die before this day ?

(*Enters a SOLDIER.*)

Soldier

The carriage is at the door.

King

Have they no instruments at hand,
—flutes and drums ? Let them strike
a glad tune. (*Coming near the door.*)
I welcome you, my kingly friend, with
all my heart.

(*Enters SUMITRA, with a covered tray
in her hands.*)

Vikram

Sumitra. My Queen !

Sumitra

King Vikram, day and night you
sought him in hills and forests, spread-
ing devastation, neglecting your people
and your honour, and to-day he
sends through me to you his coveted
head,—the head upon which death
sits even more majestic than his crown.

Vikram

My Queen !

Sumitra

Sire, no longer your Queen ; for
merciful death has claimed me.

[Falls and dies.]

Shankar

My King, my Master, my darling
boy, you have done well. You have
come to your eternal throne. God
has allowed me to live for so long
to witness this glory. And now, my
days are done, and your servant will
follow you.

(Enters ILA, dressed in a bridal dress.)

Ila

King, I hear the bridal music.
Where is my lover ? I am ready.



G. M. Bain
3.7.42.



